

COMMUNITY, HONOR, AND SECESSION IN THE DEEP SOUTH:
MISSISSIPPI'S POLITICAL CULTURE, 1840s-1861

By

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In treating Mississippi secessionism, I argue that it was a popular crusade to vindicate the slaveholding South against northern "insults." Southerners were reacting, as they saw it, to years of northern moral and political condemnation that culminated in the establishment of an antislavery party, and worst of all the election of its candidate in 1860. Bound by the regional ethic of honor--the *lingua franca* of sectionalism--Mississippi voters challenged one another to defend their communities as they believed men were required by nature and God to do. Leaders invoked cultural values of masculinity and honor with unself-conscious conviction to unite one another for the safeguarding of their families, neighborhoods and ultimately their regional way of life.

This set of deeply held convictions led to the fracturing of the Republic because of the state's localized political culture, centered in networks of "friends and neighbors."

These community bonds were driven by face-to-face transactions in which one's reputation and honor determined success. When community leaders defined the sectional controversy in terms of "craven submission" or "manly resistance," the charge of docile acquiescence was meant to be personally humiliating. Not to defy northern aggression signified disgrace before one's family, friends and neighbors, and ultimately political and personal ruin. Secession, then, was not engineered by planters fearful of slave incendiarism or crafty politicians but rather represented the natural interaction of southern honor, visceral anger, and Mississippi's antiparty, community-based political culture.

Political parties of a modern tenor, with their bureaucratic machinery and set of candidates whom the voters personally did not know or trust, were alien to the language and style of manliness and honor. In Mississippi, neither Whigs nor Democrats ever achieved a widespread following or captured the emotional allegiance of more than a tiny fraction of white men. Thus, I take issue with historians who consider the "second party system" a coherent, stable structure defined by ideology or consistent partisans. Rather than the well-traveled ground of partisan ideology and national or state issues, I place new emphasis on the purely local nature of political conflict and discover "what politics meant" to ordinary Mississippians, that is, their direct appreciation of neighborliness and blood relations in making political choices.

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s southern historians have generally suggested that divisions within the South, rather than a clash between two oppositional cultures, contributed significantly to the drive toward secession and Civil War. They perceive a conflict, or potential conflict between the white slaveowning and nonslaveowning classes, a matter of internal conditions rather than a struggle between the sections. The slaveholding minority doubted that their less wealthy neighbors had a firm commitment to slavery and the southern way of life. Thus, the argument runs, a ruling elite of masters perpetrated, or engineered secession in order to unify southern white society and maintain their hegemony over regional culture and economy.¹ While not emphasizing the "internal crisis theory," many other historians argue (or at the least, imply) that some group--usually labelled either as "fire-eaters," "planters," or "secessionists"--precipitated the climactic "crisis" in 1860 or 1861. Secession, they suggest, was not a popular response, but rather a confrontation carefully

¹ For example, James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Random House, 1982). Oakes says: "Whether they were justified or not, slaveholders approached the secession crisis fearful of an uncertain consensus among free Southerners" (229). Others include Michael P. Johnson, *Toward a Patriarchal Republic: The Secession of Georgia* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1977); Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), and to some degree William L. Barney, *The Secessionist Impulse: Alabama and Mississippi in 1860* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974).

managed by ambitious and scheming, if well-meaning politicians.² Finally, others contend that control of the "all-powerful" Democratic party was the deciding factor. Secession was possible because Democratic leaders committed to it, and voter loyalty was so intense that they inevitably followed along.³ An examination of Mississippi politics and culture throughout the late 1840s and 1850s will reveal, however, a different and more plausible explanation for secession.

Rather than internal conflict, secession is best explained as a clash between two antagonistic societies, a question of cultural distinctness. In light of sectional differentiation the Republican party's attack against the South, her values and institutions precipitated the final break. Most importantly, Republicanism violated the southerners' sense of honor, an ethic whose widespread influence distinguished the region from the rest of the country. The party of Lincoln unquestionably worried southerners with its Free Soil doctrine and potentially more aggressive posture toward slavery threatened their peculiar institution. But more offensive was the usually implicit, although sometimes explicit accusation that the southern way of life was less worthy than that of their northern countrymen. It was the Republican attack on southerners themselves--and their slave-based

² J. Mills Thornton, III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); William Cooper, Jr., *Liberty and Slavery: Southern Politics to 1860* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983).

³ Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: Wiley, 1978); for Mississippi see Percy Lee Rainwater, *Mississippi: Storm Center of Secession 1856-1861* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1938); and perhaps the ultimate expression of this argument is Thomas Alexander, "The Civil War as Institutional Fulfillment," *Journal of Southern History* 47 (Feb. 1981), 3-32.

culture—that was most important in forcing the crisis. As historians of antebellum northern politics have demonstrated, antisouthernism and not antislavery sentiment or even Free Soil was often the touchstone of Republican partisanship.⁴ Disunion, then, resulted largely from a fundamental dispute played out in the political arena between two different societies, not from a class conflict within southern society.

*

One of the most pervasive features of southern culture, and therefore politics, was an ethic of honor.⁵ Honor-bound southerners decreed that a man's self-worth was determined by his peers. He made a claim before the public as to his good character and manhood, which was either affirmed or denied by the society at large. This mechanism placed extraordinary value on appearance, style, and language. Honor was "a matter of interchanges between the individual and the community . . . meaning was imparted not with words alone, but in courtesies [and] rituals." Southern notions of manhood, linked closely to honor, emphasized competition and the ability to demonstrate power—defined

⁴ See Ronald P. Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827-1861* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), and William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

⁵ See Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); also *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Kenneth Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen: The Political Culture of American Slavery* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); Edward Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th-Century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), and Elliot J. Gorn, "'Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch': The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry," *American Historical Review*, 90 (Feb. 1985): 18-43. On the connection between honor and slavery, see esp. Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

in the arena of male rivalry. In the rural, essentially pre-modern world of 1850s Mississippi, sheer physical courage remained a fundamental part of manhood.⁶ The contest for power and importance of reputation also dictated a quick response to any perceived slight—often in the form of violence.⁷ Finally, while honor rested most basically in every individual, the ultimate goal was "to protect the individual, family, group, or race from the greatest dread that its adherents could imagine"—public humiliation.⁸ In the southern mind, perceptions of public and private often were conflated. "The southerner," summarizes Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "took as personal insult the criticisms leveled at slave society as a whole."⁹

This attitude explains why men reacted as they did to the Republicans's insistence on Free Soil and its accusation of southern inferiority. Secession was a popular crusade to

⁶ On the changing definitions of manhood in America, I have relied especially on David Leverenz, *Manhood and the American Renaissance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989). See also David G. Pugh, *Sons of Liberty: the Masculine Mind in Nineteenth-Century America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983); and Elizabeth H. Pleck and Joseph H. Pleck, *The American Man* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1980). Rather than male rivalry, some critics maintain that the anxiety and competition among men comes from a fear of women.

⁷ See esp. Gorn, "Gouge and Bite;" and for manliness and politics, Nicole Etcheson, "Manliness and the Political Culture of the Old Northwest, 1790-1860," *Journal of the Early Republic* 15 (Spring 1995): 59-77.

⁸ Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence*, vii-viii.

⁹ Wyatt-Brown, "Honor and Secession," in *Yankee Saints and Southern Sinners* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 189. On the importance of language, see 194: "We can understand neither southern honor nor the intensity of reaction to Yankee criticism without recognizing the psychological force that the actual language of political and moral discourse exercised upon the southern mind." See also Gorn, "Gouge and Bite," 27-31 and *passim*.

vindicate the slaveholding South against northern "insults." Southerners were reacting, as they saw it, to years of Northern moral and political condemnation that culminated in a suddenly popular antislavery party and the election of its candidate in 1860. Bound by the regional ethic of honor--the *lingua franca* of southern sectionalism--Mississippi voters challenged one another to defend their communities as they believed men were required to do. That was the principal reason why politicians used the language of honor when speaking about the sectional crisis. They did not "use" honor to become popular or to gain votes, but rather employed it with unself-conscious conviction to unite one another for the safeguarding of their families, neighborhoods and ultimately their regional way of life.¹⁰ Southern political leaders were struggling to vindicate their own, as well as their society's reputation and character--something more important than extending slavery into the western territories and ultimately more important than preserving the Union.

This set of deeply held convictions--honor and the duty of men to protect themselves and their community from insult--only led to a fracturing of the Republic because of the state's political culture. Political conflict centered in networks of "friends and neighbors," community bonds driven by face-to-face transactions in which one's honor and reputation determined success. When community leaders defined the sectional controversy in terms of "craven submission" or "manly resistance," the charge of docile acquiescence was meant to be personally humiliating. Not to defy Northern aggression

¹⁰ As political scientist Murray Edelman notes: "The words a group employs and on which it relies to evoke a response can often be taken as an index of group norms and conceptual frameworks." *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1964), 121.

meant disgrace before one's family, friends and neighbors, and ultimately political and personal ruin. Secession, then, was not engineered by planters fearful of slave incendiarism, or by crafty politicians out to win votes, but rather represented the natural interaction of southern honor, men's visceral anger, and Mississippi's antiparty, community based political culture.

Political parties of a modern tenor, with their bureaucratic machinery and set of candidates whom the voters personally did not know or trust, could have defused the potent language of manliness and honor. Insults offered through the institutionalized anonymity of effective parties could have been ignored. In Mississippi, though, neither Whigs nor Democrats ever achieved a widespread following or captured the emotional allegiance of more than a tiny fraction of white men. This created an atmosphere in which men considered political rhetoric as personal insults, leading often to violence. Therefore I take issue with some southern historians who consider the "second party system" a coherent, stable structure defined by ideology or consistent partisans.¹¹ In Mississippi this

¹¹ Joel Silbey, *The American Political Nation, 1838-1893* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991). Silbey summarizes that by "the late 1830s, both the Whigs and the Democrats had extensive partisan organizational structures and ways of doing business in every Southern state except South Carolina, all linked directly to their national parties. The electorate in every state . . . responded to and were guided by these organizations as they were elsewhere" (41). Other studies of southern political culture that reach generally the same conclusion include: William J. Cooper, *The South and the Politics of Slavery 1828-1856* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); J. Mills Thornton, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), who claims Alabamians considered that "men who claim to be independent of party 'are hermaphrodites in politics' and therefore 'productive of no good'" (44); Harry Watson, *Jacksonian Politics and Community Conflict: The Emergence of the Second American Party System in Cumberland County, North Carolina* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1981); M. Philip Lucas, "The Development

was not the case, a "problem" that helped lead directly to secession and national conflagration. Thus, rather than the well-traveled ground of partisan ideology and national or state issues, I place new emphasis on the purely local nature of political conflict and discover "what politics meant" to ordinary Mississippians, that is, their appreciation of neighborliness and blood relations in making political choices.

Mississippians articulated a widespread distrust of political parties and professional politicians throughout their speeches, public letters and pamphlets, editorials and private correspondence. This rhetoric in part reflected the country's republican heritage handed down from the Revolutionary generation—a tradition that warned against "corrupt cliques" and "unnatural combinations" that sought to control the government for selfish reasons.¹² But despite the declaration of these sentiments, many historians contend that the Whig and Democratic parties of the "second party system" enjoyed an intense emotional commitment from voters who operated within identifiable belief systems, traceable to state and even

of the Second Party System in Mississippi, 1817-1846," Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 1983); Marc Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836-1865* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1983); and Thomas E. Jeffrey, *State Parties and National Politics: North Carolina, 1815-1861* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1989). Jeffrey acknowledges and even emphasizes the profoundly antiparty atmosphere in antebellum North Carolina that party organizers worked hard to overcome, successfully, he argues, by the 1840s. The opposing view, that parties remained only tenuous in southern politics, is presented most clearly in Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen*.

¹² See Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967); Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1969); Robert Shalhope, "Toward a Republican Synthesis: The Emergence of an Understanding of Republicanism in American Historiography," *William and Mary Quarterly* 29 (1972): 49-80; and for the South in particular, Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen*.

local elections. In states of the North and upper South, many studies show that this was true. By the 1840s and 1850s antipartyism had become a marginal element in political rhetoric as leaders and ordinary voters alike demonstrated a more consistent faith in party organization. Joel Silbey, in a synthesis of nineteenth-century political history, concludes that 1838 represented a watershed. "The key difference by 1838 was that . . . high interest and commitment and strong party institutions fed by intense partisanship became permanent, deeply rooted, and powerfully determining of the nature of the political nation." He further contends that all Americans demonstrated a "widespread acceptance of the party role in American politics."¹³ Some recent historians of antebellum Mississippi likewise argue that parties dominated the state's political culture, and became widely accepted by the late 1830s.¹⁴

¹³ Silbey, *The American Political Nation*, 31, 33. See also Richard P. McCormick, *The Second American Party System: Party Formation in the Jacksonian Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1966). Perhaps the clearest expressions of this argument is William E. Gienapp, "'Politics Seem to Enter into Everything': Political Culture in the North, 1840-1860," in *Essays on American Antebellum Politics, 1840-1860*, ed. Stephen E. Maizlish and John J. Kushma (College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 1982): 14-69. Gienapp concludes that "[p]arty loyalty was stronger than at any other time in American history" (66). Throughout the essay he implies that "politics" = "party politics" and fails to make any distinction between politics that might not have involved parties. On the decline of antipartyism and its relegation to the margins of discourse, including the Know Nothings, see Ronald P. Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan 1827-1861* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971); Michael F. Holt, "The Politics of Impatience: The Origins of Know Nothingism," *Journal of American History* 60 (1973): 309-331.

¹⁴ Lucas, "The Development of the Second Party System in Mississippi," argues that antipartyism was "obsolete" by 1837, and the state's "pre-partisan political culture," including deference, was replaced by entrenched partisan organizations in the late 1830s and early 1840s. See also Dale R. Prentiss, "Economic Progress and Social Dissent in Michigan and Mississippi, 1837-1860," Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 1990;

Far from embracing political parties, I found that Mississippians shunned them whenever possible. They did not simply pay lip service to antiparty principles, but voters consistently rejected party control of county and local elections. In statewide races, where few voters could know candidates personally, they were often forced to follow party labels. Even at that level, however, both election returns and contemporary observations indicated that thousands of voters remained uncommitted from year to year. The result of widespread mobility, natural demographic turnover and voter choice, uncertainty characterized the whole party system. Furthermore, both the Whig and Democratic parties remained only tenuously organized, divided regionally and by prominent leaders. The Whigs, in fact, barely constituted an "organized" party. Below the state level parties had almost no impact; enthusiastic partisans proved unable to persuade voters to make county nominations, control access to public office or connect party opinions with local races. Voting returns demonstrated the lack of continuity between state and county elections and signalled a widespread rejection of parties as the organizing force in political life. Until voters embraced partisanship in local races where they typically knew the candidates as

and Bradley G. Bond, "A Southern Social Ethic: Political Economy in the Nineteenth-Century South. Mississippi, 1840-1910. (Volumes I and II)," Ph.D. Dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1993. William Barney, in *The Secessionist Impulse*, likewise emphasizes the "fierce partisan loyalty" of most voters. "Party labels were taken seriously, as professions of faith, and the renunciation of one's party was an agonizing decision" (54).

friends, neighbors or kinsmen, the political culture must be considered antiparty, or at most "deferential-participant."¹⁵

"Political culture" remains a popular term among historians, over the last fifteen to twenty years several scholars have used the term explicitly while many others have done so implicitly.¹⁶ Political culture includes both organizational components of the political system itself--how votes are cast or a party's committee structure--and psychological factors such as assumptions about deference or attitudes toward political parties. Thus it can denote a set of tangible realities, a "something" that can be described or explicated, which make up a part of the entire political order. Political scientist Walter Rosenbaum emphasizes that these aspects of political culture are usually "implicit orientations" within

¹⁵ Ronald P. Formisano, "Deferential-Participant Politics: The Early Republic's Political Culture," *American Political Science Review* 68 (June 1974): 473-87, esp. 483-5. Typically, declining deference is presented as the companion to socioeconomic diversification and the rise of mass parties. Formisano cautioned that the two processes were not inexorably intertwined, though--deference did not decline in a linear process throughout American history. Rather, it survived and even flourished from time to time and place to place.

¹⁶ The former includes, for example: Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Formisano, "Deferential-Participant Politics," and *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1790s-1840s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983). Some advocate political culture as the vehicle for a new synthesis between the "new social history" and "new political history." See for example Jean Baker, "Comments for the AHA Meeting," December 30, 1988; and from the same panel those of Samuel Hays. Hays uses the term "political meaning," something analogous to political culture.

the polity, elements so commonplace and natural that contemporaries fail to notice them in operation.¹⁷

Political culture has also been used to indicate a methodological tool--a way to examine society's most elemental assumptions and guiding principles. In other words, it can mean studying political behavior in order to reveal the often unspoken, implicit cultural assumptions that directed the life choices of ordinary citizens. Using political culture as a means to study social values assumes that political discourse illustrates basic beliefs and divisions, particularly when leaders articulate those values, assumptions, and convictions for the masses. In short, public exchanges reveal the issues and concerns that are most salient to voters and leaders alike.¹⁸ This does not preclude the possibility that

¹⁷ Walter Rosenbaum, *Political Culture* (New York: Praeger, 1975); also Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture*, 3-5. Political scientists who emphasize the attitudes--the "evaluational and affective orientations" of society--draw in particular on the work of Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963; reprint, Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1965). They, in turn, took these ideas from Talcott Parsons, see *Politics and Social Structure* (New York: The Free Press, 1969) and *The Early Essays*, ed. and with an introduction by Charles Camic (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); and Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1934), among others.

¹⁸ There is a vast literature on the relationship between individual opinion and groups norms or cultural values and ethics. M. Brewster Smith, and others, described this task as discovering the "map of opinions and personality" that each person has, and that impacts one's political attitudes. It includes one's social class, religion, ethnicity, family experience, and a host of other, sometimes idiosyncratic, factors. Political discourse and voting behavior, then, can be used to uncover the "map" of "inarticulate" persons from the past. See M. Brewster Smith, "Opinions, Personality, and Political Behavior," *The American Political Science Review* 52 (March 1958): 1-25; M. Brewster Smith, Jerome S. Bruner, and Robert W. White, *Opinions and Personality* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1956); Robert E. Lane, *Political Ideology: Why the American Common Man Believes What He Does* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962); David Riesman

followers act independently of their leaders (or vice-versa), but that leaders both shape and articulate what "ordinary" citizens think. In short, there is a reciprocal relationship between the symbols and rhetoric employed by community leaders and the values held by their "inarticulate" listeners. While politicians may often operate at a more urbane and informed level, both the elite and masses are part of a common political culture.¹⁹ Mississippi Representative Reuben Davis captured the relationship between politician and voter when he described his resignation speech before Congress in 1860. "I spoke bitterly and with some angry vehemence," Davis remembered, "because I felt myself the

and Nathan Glazer, "The Meaning of Opinion," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 12 (Winter 1948-49): 633-648, esp. 644-648; Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, *The People's Choice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944); Bernard Berelson, Paul Lazarsfeld, and William N. McFee, *Voting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954). Lazarsfeld and his colleagues emphasized the importance of one's primary group identification in making opinion. Others subsequently detailed the impact of "cross-pressures" that conflicted with primary group identification, as well as the force of other reference groups to which one may or may not belong. See esp. Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1957) on the importance of "reference group theory." The classic starting point for study of public opinion remains Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1922).

¹⁹ As Murray Edelman argues, elites could not shape symbols to serve their own ends, that behavior would be too easily discovered. See *The Symbolic Uses of Politics*, 20. On the existence of political subcultures and differences between the belief systems of elites and masses, see Philip E. Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Politics," in David E. Apter, ed., *Ideology and Discomfort* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), 206-261; Frank J. Sorauf, *Party Politics in America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1968), esp. 129-133; and Riesman and Glazer, "The Meaning of Opinion," esp. 637-643.

mouthpiece of a wronged and outraged people, and their righteous indignation poured itself through me."²⁰

"Political culture," then, encompasses the human environment--often constraining and limiting--in which politics operates. It includes the moral assumptions of society and the conventions that prescribe personal and group conduct as they affect political behavior, its political heritage and traditions, encompassing both ideology and structure, and any deeply held, perhaps unarticulated convictions regarding long-term social and cultural well-being that require political expression.²¹

²⁰ Reuben Davis, *Recollections of Mississippi and Mississippians* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., the Riverside Press, 1890), 397-398.

²¹ Among many others, on the theory of political culture see Frank J. Sorauf, *Political Parties in the American System* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1964). Sorauf focuses on parties, but makes clear that a society's political culture is crucial to understand the operation of parties. He uses the term "political environment," which includes the "formal structures of government," statutory regulations, and most importantly the "political values and political cultures that define general opinion of what a party should be, what it should do, and the rules of taste and propriety that govern the ways in which it can act" (136). As he succinctly concludes: "Storks do not bring political parties" (136). Finally, this whole notion that politics and especially political discourse reflect more than simply the belief systems of elite spokesmen draws on the work of cultural anthropologists and sociologists such as Clifford Geertz who argue that "personal ideology" is fundamentally a reflection of culture. As Geertz says, it is a "theory of the nature of human thought as a public and not, or at least not fundamentally, a private activity." Geertz quoted in "Ideology as a Cultural System," in Apter, ed., *Ideology and Discontent*, 60. See also Lane, *Political Ideology*, esp. 14-16, 310-312, 346-350, 397-399; and David E. Apter, "Ideology and Discontent" in the same volume. Ideology, Apter similarly contends, "links particular actions and mundane practices with a wider set of meanings" that reflect the cultural norms and traditions of the society. As he points out, that is a "generous" point of view--the cynic would say that "ideology may be viewed as a cloak for shabby motives" on the part of self-serving elites (16). This also draws heavily on the work of Bronislaw Malinowski. See, for example, *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1948).

Mississippi's political culture in the 1850s was dominated by ideas usually associated with early America: antipartyism and deference. Local politics in particular remained organized around neighborhood networks of friends and extended kin, allowing wealthy planters to exercise their economic, social and cultural, power.²² Candidates for numerous county and precinct officers reflected the prevailing social hierarchy, indicating that most Mississippians knew where they stood in the "pecking order." As such, politics became another way for men of honor to assert their "proper place" and status in the community; elective office became a badge of honor like owning slaves, hosting a barbecue, or dueling among gentlemen. In politics, family honor was also important, as planters in particular extended to the next generation their power and prestige. Local elections remained, in many ways, a ritualized expression of confidence in the gentry. The political culture provided a crucial bridge between the seemingly irreconcilable traits of

²² In this sense, 1850s Mississippi resembled the portrait of eighteenth-century communities that emerged from the New England town studies of the 1970s. See for example, John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970); Michael Zuckerman, *Peaceable Kingdoms: New England Towns in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970); and the discussion in Chapter Five. Those studies emphasized the importance of "horizontal" rather than "vertical" social linkages. The former denote those within the community such as kinship that do not require outside contacts--life on a small scale of face-to-face relationships. "Vertical" linkages include those extra-community connections such as political parties that signify a breakdown of community cohesiveness and beginning of a more fluid, atomistic social structure. The nomenclature of horizontal and vertical linkages comes from sociologists and is recommended to historians most persistently by Darrett Rutman. See "Assessing the Little Communities of Early America," *William and Mary Quarterly* 43 (April 1986): 163-178. The best examination of colonial political culture remains Charles S. Sydnor, *Gentlemen Freeholders: Political Practices in Washington's Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1952).

widespread mobility and a hierarchical, deferential society based on face-to-face relationships.²³

It was this political culture that combined with southern notions of masculinity and honor to precipitate secession. By the end of the antebellum period the political culture of the lower South shaped the reactions of men operating within it, every one of them participants in a shared discourse, and led them to conclude that they could not accept the victory of a Republican president. Rather than "bowing in craven submission" to the

²³ In recent years this debate in southern history centers on the work of James Oakes, Eugene Genovese and Bertram Wyatt-Brown. Oakes contends that southern society experienced too much mobility for family honor or community reputation to translate into meaningful social or political power. After the Revolution, particularly, southerners's commitment to an entrepreneurial slaveholding culture rendered inconceivable any cultural order based on patriarchal values or hereditary status. Genovese and Wyatt-Brown emphasize the importance of family honor and inherited social and cultural privileges. In short, by Oakes's reckoning southerners, like other Americans, increasingly equated status to wealth; for Genovese and Wyatt-Brown there was more involved than money. I argue in chapter six that the political culture was a critical dimension which allowed southerners to overcome the leveling, anti-deferential effects of geographic mobility, and it also helped the elite transfer their status to the next generation. See Oakes, *The Ruling Race and Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of the Old South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990); Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965), *The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969), and "Yeoman Farmers in a Slaveholders' Democracy," in Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983): 249-264; Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, and the discussion in chapter six.

Political historians have not always been sensitive to the effects of mobility. Studies of local power relationships and the development of "community" address this as a central concern. See Don Harrison Doyle, *The Social Order of a Frontier Community: Jacksonville, Illinois 1825-1870* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1978). For the effects of mobility on politics, see esp. Kenneth J. Winkle, *The Politics of Community: Migration and Politics in Antebellum Ohio* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

"yoke" of Yankee insults, men throughout Mississippi rallied to assert their own masculinity, their family and community honor, and to answer the slur of Free Soil. In the hothouse atmosphere of the state's political culture to do otherwise would have meant personal humiliation and cultural suicide.

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This work takes both a narrative and topical organization. Chapter one provides a background of Mississippi politics in the 1830s and early 1840s, tracing the state's fledgling party organizations, as well as rapid demographic and economic growth. Sectional conflict and possible secession form the background of chapter two, which examines the state elections of 1849 and 1851. It demonstrates the weakness of party ties and ease with which voters abandoned supposedly strong commitments. It also makes clear the importance of honor and manliness to the language of sectionalism and to the regional political culture. Chapters three and four trace the "politics of antipartyism" through both popular rhetoric and voting behavior. Both parties always tried to paint their opponents as more committed to "rigid organization" and filled with professional "demagogues." These appeals signalled and reflected a widespread popular distrust of political parties and demonstrated that they were far from "accepted" instruments of political life. Not only did Mississippians talk a good antiparty game, but quantitative evidence indicates that voters rejected party organization whenever possible.

Chapter five discusses the importance of "neighborhoods" in the political culture. County and local politics remained organized around neighborhood loyalties as voters supported candidates from nearby their homes. The neighborhood was such a defining

identity that state and county government codified it into law, respecting the force of community will. As a neighborhood exercise, the importance of deference to local politics becomes clear in chapter six. Candidates seemed to know instinctively to which office they might aspire; those who stepped above their station were rebuked by voters, while planters who ran for a "lower" office typically won without opposition. Finally, the election process itself reinforced family status, translating power from one generation to the next as the local elite and their sons and nephews regulated the democratic exercise. In short, Mississippi's localized political culture helped define and perpetuate the community power structure, casting light on how elites maintain their position over time.

Chapter seven details the aberration in Mississippi's antebellum political culture--the Know Nothings. For two years, many voters seemed to embrace parties rather than neighborhood networks of friends and extended kin. For the first time, the state's political culture became almost "partisan." Allowed to develop it may have meant a viable two-party system such as states in the upper South and North enjoyed, and possibly stopped secession. The Know Nothings, however, broke up as a national party in 1856 and Mississippians became more and more united in the face of Republican opposition to slavery. Politics in the late 1850s and secession, the subjects of chapter eight, witnessed a return to personal, neighborhood politics and the discourse of honor and manliness--an unfortunate combination.

Finally, while this work treats one state, Mississippi was a good representative of the deep South. It had a social, economic and demographic profile similar to other states in the region, and eventually took the lead, with South Carolina, in the movement for

southern unity and disunion. But where South Carolina had a uniquely undemocratic political system, Mississippians enjoyed almost unparalleled power at the ballot box, making it an ideal study of the interaction between popular politics and culture and southern social ethics, which led directly to secession and civil war. Secession was a political action driven by forces deep within southern culture, and to understand it we must study the political culture of the lower South--Mississippi was the quintessential lower-South state.

CHAPTER 1

MISSISSIPPI IN THE 1830s AND 1840s

Dramatic territorial and population growth were the defining characteristics of Mississippi's development and history in the 1830s and 1840s. This expansion translated into an increasingly complex social and economic infrastructure. Furthermore, the state's rapid growth brought about a fluid party system as different regions and men vied for influence amid the demographic upheaval. During the same period, Mississippi's economy underwent several spectacular cycles, most importantly during and after the Panic of 1837, which frustrated the state's development for nearly a decade. That depression also created two of the central political questions of the next fifteen years: the fate of the banking system in general; and the disposition of several million dollars worth of state-guaranteed bonds issued by institutions that failed during the Panic. Although the economic recovery was slow and sometimes uneven, by the close of the 1840s the state's economy boomed and Mississippi was the nation's leading producer of "king cotton." Finally, during this period the Whigs and Democrats, heterogenous political factions, vied with one another amid a series of issues and personal alliances.

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From 1817, when Mississippi entered the Union, and throughout the 1820s its social, political, and financial capital was the town of Natchez in the extreme southwest

corner of the state. Settled during the Spanish colonial period, the old Natchez district housed Mississippi's founding families and most of its wealth, measured in both land and slaves. The region became known for its conservative opinion on most political questions, including, for example, viva voce elections at the 1817 constitutional convention.¹ Natchezians controlled politics during the state's first years and remained one of the state's social and cultural centers up to the Civil War, even though it ceased to be a leading force in party politics.²

In the 1820s and 1830s Mississippi began its rapid development as successive Indian treaties cleared the way for white settlement. The Treaty of Doak's Stand, with the Choctaws in 1820, opened a large area along the Mississippi, Pearl, and Yazoo rivers. This region developed quickly and rivaled Natchez in population by the late 1820s. The Pearl River counties allied themselves politically with those in the "Piney Woods" section, an area of small farmers and herdsmen who owned few slaves and produced little for market. This combination thwarted attempts to expand the state's banking and credit system, for example. Natchezians relied on the small State Bank of Mississippi, and later

¹ Edwin Arthur Miles, *Jacksonian Democracy in Mississippi*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 34.

² D. Clayton James; *Antebellum Natchez* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1968); Charles Sackett Sydnor, *A Gentleman of the Old Natchez Region, Benjamin L. C. Wailes* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1938); Dunbar Rowland, *History of Mississippi: The Heart of the South*, Vol. I (Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1925), 507-564; Porter L. Fortune, Jr., "The Formative Period," in Richard Aubrey McLemore, ed., *A History of Mississippi*, Vol. I (Hattiesburg, MS: University and College Press of Mississippi, 1973), 251-259; and James J. Pillar, "Religious and Cultural Life, 1817-1860," in McLemore, ed., 378-419.

the Planters's Bank, opened in 1830. The issue of Indian removal also set Natchez against most other parts of the state as its leaders realized that their political clout eroded as each new section opened for settlement. Perhaps the most contested state issue, however, was that of internal improvements. Piney woods dirt farmers resented state money going for better transportation so the "Natchez Nabobs" could ship their cotton to market more easily. The anti-Natchez forces asserted their new power in the 1827 election to the United States Senate of Powhatan Ellis, of Wayne County, the first Senator from the Piney Woods.³

The Pearl River settlers soon began to exploit the area's rich soil for plantation agriculture and realized a common interest with the Natchez planters. In particular they reversed their contrariness toward banks, needing credit to buy more slaves, improve land, and fund improvements that would facilitate cotton marketing. Most noteworthy was their support for a branch of the Bank of the United States, which opened in Natchez in 1831.⁴ The state's territorial and demographic growth, then, translated into a series of shifting political alliances. As thousands of men moved into the state, many sought greater democratization in politics and more equitable access to public power. The movement for constitutional reform, however, came initially from conservative Natchez, whose leaders recognized that their dwindling power would erode further when settlers filled the northern half of the state. Thus, they opted instead for a preemptive strike, hoping to concede a few

³ Miles, *Jacksonian Democracy*, 18-28; Fortune, "Formative Period," 266-272; and Rowland, *Mississippi*, 552-564.

⁴ Miles, *Jacksonian Democracy*, 23-5.

reforms and yet maintain some of their previous clout. A convention met in 1832 and produced a document that turned out to be one of the most democratic constitutions in the country.⁵

The new constitution, in force until Reconstruction, swept aside all outward appearances of "aristocracy" and privilege. It removed property qualifications for suffrage or officeholding and enacted lenient residency requirements: United States citizen, one year in the state; and four months in one's county or town. Furthermore, most state offices became elected rather than appointed, including secretary of state, treasurer, auditor, and attorney general. Furthermore, the same man could not hold these offices, or the governorship, for more than four years out of any six. The commitment to democracy extended to the county level as well. The new constitution replaced county "courts" (essentially a legislature for each county), which had been appointed by the state legislature, with elected Boards of Police, consisting of five members each. Voters also elected local Justices of the Peace and Constables by beat or precinct. A proposal to elect all judges, however, became the compelling issue of the convention.⁶

⁵ Miles, *Jacksonian Democracy*, 34-5; Fortune, "Formative Period," 278-279.

⁶ There were essentially three positions on the judge question: "Whole Hogs," "Half Hogs," and "Aristocrats." The Whole Hogs, led by future Senator and Governor Henry Stuart Foote, wanted to elect all judges. The Half Hogs agreed to the election of circuit court judges, but wanted to retain appointment of state supreme court justices by the legislature. The Aristocrats, not surprisingly based in the old Natchez district, opposed election of any judges. Rowland, *Mississippi*, 565-74; Fortune, "Formative Period," 280-283; Miles, *Jacksonian Democracy*, 36-43.

State chancellor and future governor John Anthony Quitman, who reportedly lost over twenty pounds during the convention because he spoke so often and strenuously, led the faction against elected judgeships. Despite Quitman's efforts, the new constitution provided that Mississippians would elect all magistrates. Ironically this issue quickly lost its force when voters continued to choose proven, veteran judges, and Quitman later admitted that the idea turned out to be a good one. Unlike some other states, then, Mississippi's constitutional convention did not engender lasting political factions.⁷

Like many other southern states it was the presidency of Andrew Jackson around which political parties formed. The Old Hero's tremendous popularity among Mississippians rested on his military exploits and unswerving support for Indian removal, and he carried the state easily in all three of his runs for the presidency. While Jackson remained personally popular, opposition developed to some of his policies and a rival political faction formed around disgruntled leaders. Nullification and Jackson's threat of force against South Carolina, as elsewhere in the South, produced the first popular break with the President. Mississippi's Nullifiers, led by John Quitman, bolted the Jackson standard in 1833-34 and joined the small opposition, then called National Republicans. The Nullifiers never gained a large following (although they were a significant minority) among Mississippi's voters; Jackson's personal popularity and support for Indian removal

⁷ *The Mississippian*, June 29, 1849. Another leading "aristocrat" was Joseph Davis, planter and patron to his young brother Jefferson. He also conceded that elective judgeships proved not to be the calamity he feared. See Janet Sharp Herrmann, *Joseph E. Davis: Pioneer Patriarch* (Jackson and London: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), 86.

apparently seemed more important than some vague statement of principle.⁸ The other sources of what became Mississippi Whiggery coalesced around opposition to Jackson's "war" on the Bank of the United States and his selection of Martin Van Buren to replace Vice President John C. Calhoun. These three factions came together in 1834, but Democrats still elected their man Robert J. Walker to the Senate in 1835, and carried the state for Van Buren the next year.⁹

While Mississippi's party factions jockeyed for position around the administration of Andrew Jackson, the Treaties of Dancing Rabbit Creek (1830) and Pontotoc (1832) completed the job of Indian removal, allowing whites to inhabit the entire state. Mississippi's population grew rapidly during the 1830s and 1840s as immigrants flocked to the fertile southwest. In 1820 the state's white population stood at 42,176, only ten years later it exceeded seventy thousand and by 1840 reached nearly two hundred thousand. Over the span of twenty years, then, the white population increased by about 400 percent. The increase was slightly less impressive over the next two decades: 295,718 by 1850 and just over 350,000 on the eve of secession.¹⁰ The flood of slaves into the state

⁸ William J. Cooper, Jr., *The South and the Politics of Slavery, 1828-1856* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); Fortune, "Formative Period," 274-278; Miles, *Jacksonian Democracy*, *passim*.

⁹ The relative fluidity of party attachment showed in 1835, however, when the Whigs earned one of two U. S. House seats and carried their man into the governor's house. John Edmond Gonzales, "Flush Times, Depression, War, and Compromise," in McLemore, ed., 286-288; Miles, *Jacksonian Democracy*, 70-116.

¹⁰ Fortune, "Formative Period," 251-2; Rowland, *Mississippi*, 579-589; Gonzales, "Flush Times," 284; and Hugh G. Brady, "Voting, Class and Demography in Antebellum Mississippi," (MA Thesis, Northern Illinois University, 1977), chapter 1.

was even more impressive. Mississippians owned just over 32,000 blacks in 1820. By 1840 there were almost 200,000, a 700 percent rise. As with the white population the growth rate slowed in the last decades before the war. Slaves numbered about 300,000 in 1850 and 436,000 ten years later. The state's overall population, then, spiralled sharply upward following the removal of Indian claims and rose steadily if less strikingly between 1840 and 1860.¹¹

As the newly opened regions swelled with settlers, they inevitably upset the political supremacy of the Natchez-Pearl River alliance of planters. The great transformation came during the 1830s as people swarmed into the large Choctaw cession, roughly the northern third of Mississippi. By the end of the next decade north Mississippi would be politically the most powerful region in the state. As one historian noted, in 1840 "over one half of the white population resided in counties that had not even existed ten years earlier."¹²

The quick expansion and settlement upset not only political relationships, but also helped transform the state's economy. Population growth naturally led to a more complex social and economic infrastructure, a greater diversity of agricultural products, and increased pressure for internal improvements to move the marketable commodities raised on thousands of fresh, fertile acres. Furthermore, as the slave population increased, both

¹¹ John Hebron Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest: Mississippi, 1770-1860* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 118.

¹² Miles, *Jacksonian Democracy*, 28-32 (quote, 32); Rowland, *Mississippi*, 574-584.

developing and longer settled areas could produce more cotton. Finally, technological improvements combined with agricultural reforms such as soil conservation, allowing greater productivity for many farmers.¹³ This development of the state's infrastructure and economy all took money, and in the 1830s most of it was borrowed money. Something like a mania of speculation went through Mississippi as just about anyone with some resources borrowed more, gambling on new land or slaves. Because of the record land sales Mississippi's banks filled with deposits, with which they speculated freely. But in 1836 the Specie Circular and the Deposit Act levelled the state's financial house of paper.¹⁴

The Specie Circular required that settlers and speculators use gold or silver to pay for federal land, a restriction that had dire consequences. State banks began to run out of hard currency as investors and settlers alike drained them of gold and silver. The Deposit Act was, in the long run, even more calamitous. It provided that all money from federal land sales be distributed to each state in quarterly payments in 1837. Because so much public land had been sold in Mississippi, the state's banks had collected a huge amount (over six million dollars), but had in turn loaned out much of the money to finance further investments. The problem was that the state was entitled to only about \$500,000 under

¹³ Dale R. Prentiss, "Economic Progress and Social Dissent in Michigan and Mississippi, 1837-1860," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 1990), 78; and John Hebron Moore, *Agriculture in Ante-Bellum Mississippi* (New York: Octagon Books, 1971).

¹⁴ Gonzales, "Flush Times," 289-294; and Miles, *Jacksonian Democracy*, 117-129. The classic contemporary statement of this speculative era is Joseph G. Baldwin, *The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi: A Series of Sketches* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1853).

terms of the new law, and thus throughout 1837 the state would be systematically drained of federal money, prompting many banks to call in their loans. As bankers called in the loans and debtors could not pay, the banks folded.¹⁵

The "bank issue" became a hot political question in the wake of this Panic and bank failures. Democrats exploited the growing antipathy towards banks with greater success than their opponents, and in 1839 the state elections turned on the question of what to do about the banking system. Whigs tried to counter the Democratic assault on banks by charging that it was in fact the Democrats who controlled the state legislature in 1836 and 1837 when most of the failed banks had been chartered. Democrats, however, won a sweeping victory by denouncing banks in general and supporting the independent treasury scheme.¹⁶ The most lasting political question to come out of the Panic, however, proved to be the fate of bonds issued by the Union Bank. State legislators hoped that this institution, chartered after the Panic had already begun, would stem the tide of commercial failure by resuming specie payments and, in general, by following more rigorous policies regarding loans--in short, to show responsibility through sound financial principles. The bank's bonds, issued in return for capital, were backed by a pledge of support from the

¹⁵ Demonstrating the severity of the crisis was an 1837 investigation (which included a majority of the state's banks) that revealed the ratio of coin owned to paper in circulation to be one to fifteen. Furthermore, the banks had acquired less than one half of their prescribed capital. Miles, *Jacksonian Democracy*, 130-145; Brady, "Voting, Class and Demography," 66-68; 104-112; and Rowland, *Mississippi*, 592-594.

¹⁶ Further helping their cause was a reunification with John Quitman and his Nullifiers, who had cooperated with the Whigs since 1832, but now followed their hero Calhoun back to the Democrats.

state legislature. In other words, the state had put its own credit behind the bonds. When the Union Bank failed, taxpayers suddenly found themselves on the hook for millions of dollars worth of bonds.¹⁷

Governor McNutt first suggested that the state repudiate the Union Bank bonds in his annual message in January, 1841. McNutt argued that bond sales had been fraudulent and the people of Mississippi were not obligated to pay off the debt. Although couched in constitutional language, the governor recognized a plain truth: there was simply not enough money in the state to pay off the bonds. "Such an enormous tax can never be collected from the hard earnings of the people of this State," McNutt admitted. "They will not elect representatives who will impose it, or tax gatherers who will collect it." Despite these dire predictions, however, the Democratic-controlled legislature passed a resolution urging that the bonds be paid, to protect the state's credit and honor.¹⁸ The "bond issue" took center stage in 1841 when Whigs generally supported paying the bonds and, contrary to their usual apathy, ran a vigorous campaign behind Methodist minister David Shattuck,

¹⁷ Unfortunately the bank tried to get going in 1838, when the general economic collapse was well under way. Further hindering the new institution was the appalling lack of sound management, through which the directors gave their friends huge loans with little collateral and authorized exorbitant salaries for bank officers, among other incompetence. Rowland, *Mississippi*, 599-605; 611-625; May, *Quitman*, 107; Miles, *Jacksonian Democracy*, 146-156; and Gonzales, "Flush Times," 294-295; Brady, "Voting Class and Demography," 120.

¹⁸ *Mississippi House Journal* (1841), 23-26, quoted in Miles, *Jacksonian Democracy*, 156.

their gubernatorial nominee.¹⁹ A majority of Democratic voters supported McNutt's plan of repudiation and the party's nominee Tilghman Tucker, a vocal opponent of the Union Bank when chartered in 1838. The Democrats won again, and the next legislature passed a resolution that essentially repudiated the Union Bank bonds. In the years immediately following Tucker's election, lawmakers approved legislation to the effect that if a bank suspended specie payments, then all debts were wiped out.

Although Democrats generally supported repudiation and Whigs opposed, the bond issue was never strictly a partisan issue. A significant minority of bond-paying Democrats continued to work with the Whigs throughout the antebellum period, as the bond issue came up again and again. Furthermore, the fate of another set of bank bonds (these issued by the Planters' Bank) also remained undecided. Various schemes to redeem the bonds continued to surface.²⁰ There is some evidence that the collapse of the banking system and general depression hurt the Whigs in particular, even though their opponents were in power throughout most of the period. One study using quantitative data found a positive correlation between economic prosperity and Whig success, suggesting that when times were good voters favored banks and the free and easy capital they loaned out. But when

¹⁹ Some Whigs were so alarmed by repudiation that they went so far as to organize a committee of correspondence to get out the vote for William Henry Harrison, one year earlier. They carried the state for their man, the only time a Whig did so in the antebellum period.

²⁰ Brady, "Voting, Class and Demography," 132-141; Robert E. May, *John A. Quitman: Old South Crusader* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 118-119; Miles, *Jacksonian Democracy*, 156-159; and Prentiss, "Economic Progress," 236-238.

the economy soured, cautious men blamed the banks, which had become associated in their minds with the Whig party. Demonstrating the ambiguity of the evidence, however, Edwin Miles concluded that "[h]ard times seriously impaired Democratic chances in Mississippi."²¹

Devoid of banks and starved for capital the Mississippi economy limped through the early 1840s, recovering slowly. But the soil in much of the state was simply too rich and the population growing too fast for the economy to stagnate very long. When cotton prices rose in 1846 and 1847 the boom was back on and it continued virtually uninterrupted until the war. During the 1850s more and more of the state's farmers grew cotton, and with a growing rail network had greater access to external markets. Productivity also improved. In 1849 the state ranked third nationally among cotton producers, but ten years later, despite no increase in the percentage of Mississippians engaged in farming, it produced over one-fifth of the country's total crop.²² The economy,

²¹ Brady, "Voting, Class and Demography." He concludes that "in general it seems that when times were good, growth correlated negatively with Democratic voting, perhaps because growing areas needed the credit banks could provide and were unwilling to go along with Democratic calls for reform and/or hard money. When times were bad the factors of growth seem to have helped the Democrats, perhaps because those who were indebted and who had scant prospects of paying off the loans sought legislated relief" (142). Miles, *Jacksonian Democracy*, 166.

²² Prentiss, "Economic Dissent," 77-87; and Gonzales, "Heartland," 321. Another measure of returning prosperity was the level of state indebtedness. In 1844 the state owed over 600,000 dollars, but four years later only about 37,000. This amount, of course, did not include the millions of repudiated Union Bank bonds. Miles, *Jacksonian Democracy*, 167.

then, although not diversified in terms of exports was vibrant through the last decade of the antebellum period.²³

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Historians have offered different interpretations of Mississippi's political culture in the 1830s and 1840s. According to Edwin Miles, Mississippi was a state characterized by regionalism and factionalism, the organizing factor was Andrew Jackson, around whom politicians arrayed themselves. For instance, the Old Hero's public letter of friendship for Robert Walker, Miles claims, provided the key to his victory in 1835.²⁴ It was Jackson's response to South Carolina that sent Mississippi's Nullifiers into the opposition for the decade of the 1830s.

Philip Lucas, however, maintains that sectionalism played little or no role in state politics in this early period, but rather county concerns and "personal considerations" were paramount to most legislators. In addition, national politics, including Jackson, were "irrelevant" in the state at this time. "In the gubernatorial races," Lucas concludes, "Jackson had no impact." He further argues that the state's political culture before parties

²³ Although the economy had begun to thrive again by the late 1840s, some observers contend that the depression was so severe as to prohibit any real confidence among the people even after the good times returned. When the economy recovered, historian Dale Prentiss argued, "[p]rosperity was . . . hoped for but neither to be expected nor trusted. The pace of change surprised nearly everyone, delighted almost no one." The severity of the depression, he continued, created a "popular receptivity to retrenchment and anticommmercial programs." This uneasy sentiment fostered a spirit of social dissent during the 1850s, one which helped the fire-eaters when they, in Prentiss' opinion, played upon popular fears of economic change and led the state out of the Union under the "false" issue of a threat to slavery. Prentiss, "Economic Progress," 54.

²⁴ *Jacksonian Democracy*, 108.

had three major features: an "acceptance of unrestrained pluralism," especially among legislators, guaranteeing a fragmented political system; antiparty sentiments among both leaders and the masses that prohibited organized parties; and "a tendency towards deference which defined the relationship between the many groups in society and their particular leaders."²⁵ In the middle and late 1830s, though, Lucas contends that this "pre-partisan" political culture gave way to the "shrine of party." A rigid party organization, characterized by a committed partisan press and regular nominating conventions replaced the deferential relationships between elites and masses and party loyalty superseded the haphazard arrangement of factional interests. By 1837 in fact, the author contends that "not only was antipartyism obsolete but politicians took great care to justify and legitimize their new organizations."²⁶ Between 1835 and 1839, voters developed strong loyalties, elected officials demonstrated partisan coherence in their legislative behavior, and organization grew--all indicating widespread acceptance of parties.

The Democrats led the switch to this new style of politics. They tried county meetings and a state convention in 1834-35, with mixed results. When they shied away from the practice in 1837 and did poorly, Lucas argues that party leaders blamed the result on their abandonment of regular nominating procedures. Therefore, the party returned to conventions in 1839 and stuck with it from that point forward. The Whigs also went to the

²⁵ Melvin Philip Lucas, "The Development of the Second Party System in Mississippi, 1817-1846," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 1983), 84-86, 7-8 (quote).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 8-20 (quote, 18-19).

convention system in 1839, Lucas contends. "They did so," he admits, "against some resistance and, although the party structure was not as mature as the Democrats', it represented a significant and final break from the past."²⁷ Another indication of the changed climate was the greater partisan control over campaigns. In short, according to Lucas, antipartyism, deference, and chaotic factionalism were extinct by 1840.

Although he disagrees with Lucas regarding regionalism and the power of Jackson, Miles' likewise emphasizes the potency of a partisan political culture. He argues, for instance, that by 1835 in the "new political climate . . . party endorsement was a *sine qua non* for political advancement." Furthermore, although the convention system had been attacked in 1835 and 1836, it "had triumphed by 1839."²⁸ Miles admits, however, that party lines "were never rigid" in Mississippi throughout the 1830s. After 1840, when the Nullifiers returned to the Democratic party, the latter was "assured" of supremacy for the rest of the antebellum period.²⁹

Both Lucas and Miles, then, maintain that pre-partisan attitudes and behavior were obsolete by about 1840. They argue that most Mississippians preferred parties as the best means of political conflict, that the convention nominating system was triumphant, and that a rigid organization had replaced deferential relations. An examination of the later

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 270-273, 325-389 (quote, 389).

²⁸ *Jacksonian Democracy*, 115, 163. Robert May echoed similar sentiments when he attributed John Quitman's loss to Henry Foote in 1846 to the former's "ineptitude as a Jacksonian Era politician." See *Quitman*, 129.

²⁹ *Jacksonian Democracy.*, 164, 158.

antebellum period will reveal that this position is grossly overstated. Antipartyism and deference continued to define Mississippi's political culture, and one's neighborhood remained the focus of political activity and loyalty, not necessarily the party or even the state. These features of the political culture were never more clear than during the elections of 1849 and 1851, and the accompanying furor over the Compromise of 1850.

CHAPTER 2

THE CRISIS AND POLITICAL ALIGNMENT OF 1849-51

The political controversy surrounding the Compromise of 1850 betrayed some of the central elements in Mississippi's political culture, in particular the feeble attachment, among many voters, to the Whig and Democratic parties. The nearly two-year debate also exposed the importance of a common discourse among all Mississippians regarding sectionalism and conflict with the North, a set of symbols and vocabulary centered in cultural notions of manhood, honor, and masculinity.¹ Partisans on both sides routinely

¹ Notions of "honor" and "masculinity" vary across cultures and often among people of different social and economic classes. Southern honor--in its most encompassing sense--rested with the individual, and for men in his ability to show mastery or power over others. But there was also an attachment to community and group honor that transcended individualism and bound white men together. This devotion became particularly evident in the rural South, where the scope of life was small and neighborhood reputation could mean something. Most of all, honor-bound southerners remained tied to their local communities because it was there they confirmed status: the community validated one's claim to honor, in which the demonstration of mastery and maintenance of reputation were crucial. For the South in particular see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982). Studies that examine the concept in other cultures or from a comparative perspective include: Jean G. Peristiany, ed., *Honour and Shame: the Values of Mediterranean Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966); David D. Gilmore, ed., *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean* (Washington, D. C.: American Anthropological Association, 1987). For Gilmore in particular the touchstone of Mediterranean honor was the inextricable connection between male honor and female virtue. Both masculinity and male honor are defined in relation to femininity--being a man means not being feminine, including the implication of sexual weakness, and, ultimately, victimization. "Mediterranean honor, then, is a 'libidinized' social reputation; and it is this eroticized

invoked the language of honor and manliness, mixed with images of family and community. Political activists used this as the *lingua franca* of politics, and in particular of sectionalism, because it resonated so intimately with the male population at large.² In

aspect of honor . . . that seems to make the Mediterranean variant distinctive" (11). While historians of the ethic in the South concede the value of female sexual purity for family (male) honor, they do not make it such a central feature of male honor or masculinity. See also Frank Henderson Stewart, *Honor* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994) [on Bedouin Arab society]; John Kennedy Campbell, *Honor, Family and Patronage: A Study of Institutions and Moral Values in a Greek Mountain Community* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964); and John Davis, *People of the Mediterranean* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977).

² The social construction of masculinity, closely tied to honor, also changes over time and among men of different classes. In Mississippi, I argue that masculinity was defined largely in the arena of male rivalry (rather than in the home). It included hospitality, honesty and gentility, but the touchstone was still physical, and in some ways emotional courage—being manly meant the willingness to put life on the line for personal beliefs or reputation, as well as family and community pride. Politics provided one of the crucial areas in which southern men could both compete with one another and satisfy the imperatives of honor. In the nineteenth century, many scholars argue that a new definition of masculinity was becoming paramount in the North. With a changing economy and increasingly atomistic social structure, male rivalry focused more and more on the workplace and financial success, rather than physical courage or community reputation. On the evolution of American notions of manhood, I have relied particularly on David Leverenz, *Manhood and the American Renaissance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), esp. 3-18, 34-52, 73-81, and 108-09. See also E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993). Rotundo makes a distinction between "communal manhood" and "self-made manhood." The former, characteristic of eighteenth-century New England, thrived in small, close-knit communities and emphasized the duties men owed to other men in the area; the latter (triumphant in the North by the 1820s) focused on the individual and his success in securing a sound economic base for his family. Rotundo's distinction is analogous to that made by cultural historians who emphasize the distinctiveness of southern "honor" vs. northern "dignity" in the nineteenth century. See esp. Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th-Century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), ch. 1. Other works on the changing notion of masculinity include Elizabeth H. Pleck and Joseph H. Pleck, *The American Man* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1980); Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen, eds., *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America* (Chicago:

this way, politicians and editors reflected the most pervasive values and ethics among their fellow Mississippians.³ When David Wilmot introduced his free soil proviso in the House of Representatives, he touched off a political protest throughout the lower South that disrupted old party lines. Mississippians revealed the impact of Wilmot's action in the state elections of 1849 and mass meetings that Spring and Fall, in which Whigs and Democrats cooperated. After passage of the Compromise of 1850, the weakness of partisan attachment showed again as political factions realigned around the issue of resistance to, or acquiescence in the sectional adjustment measures. In short, the crisis of 1849-51 demonstrated some of the basic characteristics of the state's antebellum political culture.

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University of Chicago Press, 1990) and David G. Pugh, *Sons of Liberty: The Masculine Mind in Nineteenth-Century America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983). More theoretical are Mark B. Schoenberg, *Growing Up Male: The Psychology of Masculinity* (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1993) and Leonard Kriegel, *On Men and Manhood* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1979). Elliot Gorn describes an "underground" and "marginalized" working-class culture of masculinity in New York City during the 1850s that looks much like southern honor. It flourished, Gorn notes, among a small segment of northern society and was increasingly out-of-step with dominant regional trends. See "'Good Bye Boys: I Die a True American': Homicide, Nativism, and Working-Class Culture in Antebellum New York City," *Journal of American History* 74 (Sept. 1987), 388-410.

An alternative emphasis on manhood places it in the household rather than male rivalry--men are men because they have mastery over women and children. See Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). This is also related to scholars of Mediterranean honor, who emphasize the connection between masculinity and female sexuality. See esp. Gilmore, ed., *Honor and Shame*, 2-21, 90-103.

³ See Murray Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1964).

The clearest expression of a new consensus that obliterated current partisanship appeared in the "Central Association" meeting, held in Jackson in October, 1849. An earlier, smaller conference of the previous May had called for this subsequent convention. Newspaper editors had sparked public agitation for the bipartisan meetings, initially led by the Democratic press but soon joined by many Whigs.⁴ Leading men of both parties endorsed the October convention, as did county meetings throughout the state. The Democratic third district convention, for example, resolved "to lay aside all party feeling" and make common defense against the antislavery North. Most counties made the bipartisanship explicit, choosing an equal number of Whigs and Democrats as delegates to the upcoming convention. The resolutions from Carroll county were typical. After expressing outrage at Northern actions, the citizens' meeting resolved that "the chairman of this meeting is requested to appoint six delegates (three of each political party) to represent the county of Carroll in the Southern State Convention." In Delta, Coahoma County, Patrick W. Tompkins and J. J. Davenport, Whig Representative and well-known Democrat, respectively, addressed the citizens and supported resolutions that urged Mississippians to forget partisan differences when regarding the all-important issues of

⁴ Cleo Hearon, "Mississippi and the Compromise of 1850," *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society* XIV (1914), 45-60; Newspapers included, for example, *The Mississippian*, March 16 and April 20, 1849, and *The Herald and Correspondent*, April 27, 1849.

slavery and Southern rights.⁵ Even in their county nominating conventions, Democrats from Holmes, Madison, and Rankin, for instance, all made explicit appeals to the Whigs.⁶

When the convention met in October, its members chose William L. Sharkey, Mississippi's leading Whig, and Democratic Governor Joseph W. Matthews as president and vice-president. The delegates outlined their objections to Northern action against slavery and expressed sentiments of state sovereignty. In his address to the convention, President Sharkey urged the delegates to "lay aside party predilections, and meet it [northern aggression], not as politicians, but as patriots--as statesmen."⁷ The essence of the convention, then, was a unity that hoped to overcome party prejudices, as evidenced by committees consisting of equal numbers of men from both parties. Furthermore, since the initial call for the original May convention came from several Democratic editors, the selection of arch-Whig Sharkey as president sent a clear message that the movement sought to ignore partisanship. This October meeting also endorsed the proposed Nashville convention, scheduled for the next year to discuss a cooperative response among all the southern states. The initial phase of the resistance movement, then, following the introduction of the Wilmot Proviso but prior to the Compromise of 1850, was manifestly bipartisan--Free Soil evidently had the power to unite Mississippians across party lines.

⁵ *The Mississippian*, July 20, 1849, and September 28, 1849. Other examples include *The Gazette*, November 15, 1850.

⁶ Printed in *The Mississippian*, June 15, 1849.

⁷ *Ibid.*, October 5 and 12, 1849.

The regular state elections in 1849, however, did not involve simply sectionalism. But even without the unifying power of northern "aggression," Mississippi's Whigs and Democrats showed a telling lack of enthusiasm for partisanship throughout the canvass. The Whigs in particular seemed uncommitted to making a campaign that year. When speculation began that General John Quitman would be the Democratic nominee, one Whig editor remarked that he "is a brave man and an honorable one, and if a member of that party is to fill the gubernatorial chair during the ensuing term, we would greatly prefer him to any other that we know of."⁸ Other Whigs may have favored Quitman because he was once a bond-payer, and there were proportionately more opposed to repudiation in that party than among the Democrats.⁹ The General was also a hero of the recent Mexican War and thus widely esteemed as a military chieftain. Even by mid-summer, Whigs everywhere seemed unconcerned that their party had made no moves toward a slate of candidates. In Madison County, for instance, local Whigs apparently preferred farming to politics. "We have conversed with many of our political friends from the country," the newspaper in Canton reported, "and they inform us that [with] late frosts, and the amount of work to

⁸ *The Herald and Correspondent*, April 6, 1849.

⁹ The legislature's decision to repudiate bonds backed by the credit of the state was a controversial issue throughout the 1840s, see in particular Edwin Arthur Miles, *Jacksonian Democracy in Mississippi* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1960); Melvin Philip Lucas, "The Development of the Second Party System in Mississippi, 1817-1846," Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 1983; Dale R. Prentiss, "Economic Progress and Social Dissent in Michigan and Mississippi, 1837-1860," Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 1990; and Bradley Bond, "A Southern Social Ethic: Political Economy in the Nineteenth-Century South. Mississippi, 1840-1910," Ph.D. Dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1993.

be done at home, they are not anxious to open this year's political campaign" until the summer. As late as June, according to their local editor, the Whigs in Claiborne county wanted "no partisan action during the summer and fall."¹⁰

Once the Whigs did get around to fixing a date for their state convention, some, at least, remained diffident. In Port Gibson they admitted "no measures of State policy, on which parties are divided," and "no good" which could come of a state convention. The editor recommended that the party could select some candidates for Congress in the various district conventions, and if it was imperative "to nominate a Gubernatorial candidate in opposition to Gen. Quitman (with whose election we would be quite well satisfied), why let us take up Major Bradford, and vote for him." The editor did finally admit, however, that the county would participate in the convention if it did actually meet. In Vicksburg, the local editor finally decided in May that he was "in favor of running a candidate for Governor," but hoped the party could avoid a "divisive" and naturally "unpopular" convention.¹¹

Some Whigs finally did meet in the late summer heat of Jackson, although only sixteen of fifty-nine counties sent delegates. After changing their name to the "Taylor Republican party," they nominated General Thomas Polk for governor. Polk was from

¹⁰ *Canton Creole*, May, 1849, quoted in *The Herald and Correspondent*, May 11, 1849, and June 8, 1849. Port Gibson, located near Quitman's home in Natchez, also may have favored the General as a local man. The town, however, was in the traditionally most Whiggish part of the state, and thus an unlikely place to give up partisanship so easily. See also the *Vicksburg Daily Whig*, May 15, 1849.

¹¹ *The Herald and Correspondent*, June 8 and 29, 1849; *Vicksburg Weekly Whig*, May 1, 1849; *Vicksburg Daily Whig*, May 15, 1849.

Port Gibson, but even that failed to spark any interest from the town's newspaper or partisans. The citizens of his home town announced no rallies to convince the General to accept his nomination, and Polk eventually declined the offer. In mid-August the party still had no candidate. Luke Lea finally agreed to run as the Whig nominee for governor, but not for another month did the party find a Congressional candidate in the fourth district.¹² Such ineptitude and lack of commitment to the convention system or formal nominations were not exceptional for the Whigs.

Throughout the 1840s, in fact, during the supposed height of the "second party system," Mississippi's Whigs proved simply unwilling or unable to muster much enthusiasm for party maneuvers. In 1841 the Whigs gathered delegates from thirty-five counties at their convention in Jackson, although nearly half of those who attended came from Hinds County. Two years later they contemplated partisan suicide when offering to endorse the Democratic gubernatorial nominee if that party would choose a bond-payer. Not surprisingly, Whig delegates from only thirty counties bothered to attend that year's convention. In 1845 they held a "meeting," with about a dozen counties represented, but declined to make formal nominations. The man they "recommended" to the voters for governor decided not to run and the party failed to find a candidate until October 10, less than three weeks before the election. That same year the *Vicksburg Whig* kept confusing the names of its party's candidates. For Congress the paper initially reported Walter Brooke, later corrected to Walker Brooke; for Secretary of State George Torrey (correct),

¹² *The Mississippian*, July 20, 1849. *The Herald and Correspondent*, July 20, August 10 and 17, and September 14, 1849.

but changed to John L. Torrey; for Treasurer William Gray, but sometimes Joseph P. Gray; and for Auditor Joseph Williams or John Williams.¹³

The Whig experience in 1847 proved even more disheartening to party enthusiasts. They held no convention at all and by late September still had nominated no candidates for state office. "[W]e have candidates for Congress in several districts," lamented one editor, "[b]ut as regards a State ticket, we are positively nowhere!" He then went on to suggest some possible men for governor and urged the party to decide on one before any more time slipped by. Not until October 16, two weeks before the election, did the paper announce General A. B. Bradford as Whig for Governor.¹⁴ Democrats could scarcely fail to notice their opponents' ineptitude. Editor Benjamin F. Dill conferred with John Quitman as late as September and agreed that "you are . . . aware of the fact that the Whigs offer no organised [sic] opposition to our slate of candidates."¹⁵ Throughout the 1840s, then, the Whigs frequently failed to find a candidate on the first try, and sometimes ran multiple candidates (as did the Democrats at times). The party's experience in 1849, as well as

¹³ *Vicksburg Daily Whig*, February 4, 1841; Hugh G. Brady, "Voting, Class and Demography in Antebellum Mississippi," M.A. Thesis, Northern Illinois University, 1977, 90-95, *The Mississippian*, June 29, 1843, *Vicksburg Tri-Weekly Whig*, June 17, 1843; *The Mississippian*, August 6, 1845; *Vicksburg Tri-Weekly Whig*, August 9 and September 6, 1845; and *Vicksburg Daily Whig*, Sept. 6, 1845.

¹⁴ *Vicksburg Tri-Weekly Whig*, Sept. 30, 1847; *Vicksburg Daily Whig*, Oct. 19 and 20, 1847.

¹⁵ Benjamin Dill to John A. Quitman, Sept. 7, 1847, J. F. H. Claiborne Collection, Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH), Jackson, MS, box 2, folder 5.

earlier in the decade, then, belied one historian's assertion that by 1839 the Whigs made a "final break from the past" and "committed" to the convention system.¹⁶

Some Democrats likewise expressed dissatisfaction with their party's nominating process in 1849, sentiments that revealed a lack of firm commitment to the convention system. Jasper county's partisans complained that no one should be allowed on the convention floor who was not an accredited, voting delegate. "The distant counties are most generally represented by one or two gentlemen, and frequently by proxy," they explained, "while the counties contiguous to the capital appoint some twenty or thirty delegates . . . who exert undue influence upon the Convention by their presence." This protest was apparently not altogether self-serving since Jasper County was itself relatively close to the capital.¹⁷

The editors of the state Democratic organ, *The Mississippian*, felt compelled to deny charges that the "Jackson clique" would have the whole convention rigged, "as usual." Their critics protested that delegates from the other counties would simply be asked to ratify their prearranged decisions. The same editors found it necessary to defend at

¹⁶ Lucas, "The Development of the Second Party System in Mississippi," 389. *The Port Gibson Herald and Correspondent* editor, claiming to speak for the Taylor men of his county, synopsized his party's attitude toward conventions. "There is a growing dislike of the whole partizan convention system in this community, we have never seen any good result from them, they being ever controlled by a clique of wire workers, who totally disregard the wishes of the masses, and we are therefore not at present disposed to take any part or lot in such matters" (June 8, 1849).

¹⁷ *The Mississippian* (Jackson), June 15, 1849. See also the resolutions of Hancock County, on the Gulf coast, which complained that "something is wrong somewhere" since they failed to get mail service and due consideration from the rest of the state (July 20).

length the entire convention system. They argued that conventions were necessary to prevent the election of someone like Zachary Taylor, a man without any "established creed." The editors went on to say that who was nominated remained unimportant, but only that he be committed to the party's principles—a theory that outlying counties contested.¹⁸ Clearly some Democrats in and around the capital were committed to the convention system, but those from the rest of the state remained skeptical.

The "independent" candidacy of Reuben Davis offered further evidence that many Mississippians reluctantly accepted the convention system. Davis, something of a maverick, announced his intention to run for Congress in the state's second district without a nomination from the Democratic state convention. Davis later explained his aborted campaign as one motivated by the voters' opposition to conventions. During the previous two elections the Whigs had made much capital out of the "caucus" issue, he maintained, and their most effective tactic was "the abandonment by them of party ties and party principles." The Whigs shrewdly condemned the convention system, Davis continued, because "they full well know a very extensive and very just opposition exists in the body of the party that resorts to its use."¹⁹ Davis's phraseology intimated that contemporaries

¹⁸ *The Mississippian*., February 23 and April 13, 1849. Other examples of the party's regional problems included "The Next Governor" in *The Mississippian*, January 15, 1847: "We have noticed a number of articles urging the claims of the north to the candidate; and some of them, we regret to say, are conceived in rather a bad spirit . . . [and] we would say to our northern friends of the press, that it would be best for the interests of our party, that they would abstain from all [these] uncalled for attacks upon our present Executive, or any of his democratic predecessors."

¹⁹ *The Mississippian*, May 4 and August 17. See also Reuben Davis, *Recollections of Mississippi and Mississippians* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., the

considered the Whigs to be an "antiparty party," and hostile to nominating caucuses. It also indicated an apparent enmity toward the convention system among many Democrats.

The Democracy, then, also endured considerable antiparty and anticonvention sentiment. Their state convention, which did nominate General Quitman for governor, could muster delegates from only thirty-nine of fifty-nine counties, although compared to their opponents they ran an organized campaign. The almost complete absence of partisanship showed in the district three race for Congress. The Taylor Republican nominee Henry Gray vowed to vote against any new national bank, any higher tariff, internal improvements, and distribution of money from federal land sales (all traditionally advocated by Whigs). He further swore to denounce his own president if Taylor signed a bill that endorsed Free Soil. The only difference between Gray and his opponent William McWillie seemed to be the former's greater confidence in Taylor as a Southerner and his belief that "Old Zack" would veto the Wilmot Proviso. One Democrat reported sardonically after a debate between the two men that he remained unsure as to who was the Democrat and who was the Whig.²⁰ Quitman won an easy victory, probably helped by his status as war hero and firm supporter of Southern Rights. Some voters likely associated the gubernatorial election with the southern movement, and Quitman seemed a more vigorous and prestigious champion than Luke Lea.

Riverside Press, 1890), 300-304.

²⁰ *The Mississippian*, June 22, September 7 and 21, 1849.

The November election, following closely the statewide, bipartisan convention of October 1, showed Mississippians largely united in their opposition to Northern "aggression." The Compromise of 1850, however, broke the unanimity among Mississippi's voters on the "southern question." Men divided over whether to acquiesce in the Congressional measures, or to resist them as unfair to Southern interests. The disagreement again cut across party lines and precipitated the formation of two new parties. Events in January, 1850 began the dissolution of old party loyalties and the formation of new organizations committed or opposed to sectional agitation. First, Mississippi's Congressional delegation told their constituents that they considered the possible admission of free soil California as an attempt to implement the Wilmot Proviso. Next, Henry Clay introduced his compromise proposals designed to solve all outstanding difficulties between the sections.²¹ California's free soil constitution and Clay's adjustment measures eventually polarized public opinion, leading to partisan realignment.

Beginning in late February, men "friendly to the Union" and in favor of Clay's compromise measures began to meet in Jackson and other towns. Although Whigs initially had a majority in these meetings, Democrats soon joined. At a meeting in Jackson, for example, Colonel D. C. Glenn, a leading Democrat, called for his fellow partisans to leave such an assembly. One observer reported that "after some confusion" in which no

²¹ The Compromise of 1850 included the admission of California with a free soil constitution; settlement of the Texas-New Mexico boundary dispute; organization of the southwest territory gained from Mexico without restrictions on slavery; abolition of the slave trade in the District of Columbia, but upholding the institution itself there; and, later, a supposedly more stringent fugitive slave law.

one, apparently, followed Glenn's protest, the meeting continued. Whether or not the Colonel's withdrawal was in fact solitary, the account demonstrated that many Democrats had endorsed the Whig support of Clay's package. In meeting after meeting, observers noticed the cooperation between former Whigs and Democrats. "There was no bank question, or sub-treasury question, or tariff question raised," reported one Unionist, but simply "friends of the Union" standing "shoulder to shoulder." Contemporaries, then, recognized that former partisan rivals had put aside old antagonisms in a matter of several weeks.²²

Throughout March and April men held rallies for the Union throughout the state. In May the partisan press began to realign. *The Monroe Democrat* criticized the incapacity of the recent state legislature, controlled by its own party. The legislators, editor William D. Chapman said, agitated disunion and resistance to northern aggression simply to curry favor with the voters. "[T]here never has been concentrated about our state capitol," Chapman preached, "such an amount of bastard patriotism and unmitigated demagogueism as assembled there last winter."²³ The shape of the new partisan order gained definition as the Compromise worked through Congress during the summer and fall of 1850.

One of the central figures in getting the adjustment bills through the Senate was Mississippi's Henry Stuart Foote. A political maverick in the 1830s dubbed "Colonel Weathercock" by his opponents, Foote had been a Democrat for several years. Although

²² *The Herald and Correspondent*, March 1 and 8, 1850; *Flag of the Union*, May 9, 1851.

²³ *Monroe Democrat*, April 26, 1850.

opposed to Free Soil, Foote supported the admission of California as part of an overall compromise package. Thus, he worked with Illinois' Stephen Douglas to get the related measures through the upper house. Mississippi's other Senator, Jefferson Davis, opposed the Compromise. Public opinion back home naturally coalesced around these two men. When the Compromise finally passed both houses of Congress, in late September, Governor Quitman added fuel to the political fire by calling a special legislative session to consider the measures and Mississippi's possible response. The legislators eventually recommended a state convention, with an election for delegates scheduled September 1-2, 1851. This contest quickly became the focus of new parties, dubbed "Union" and "State-Rights."

Just as Whigs initially provided the core of Union party supporters, Democrats unquestionably led the emerging opposition to compromise. But also like their opponents, the State-Rights party soon drew strength from both the old organizations. As one contemporary wrote to a friend, "[t]he Democratic and Whig parties here are cut into fragments and these fragments have formed Union and Disunion [State-Rights] parties." Some Whigs wrote their local newspapers, urging fellow partisans to oppose the Compromise and join the new party. Former Whigs were likewise prominent in the State-Rights party organization. "A Whig presided over our County meeting," wrote the party's central committeemen to one county secretary, "and Whigs were appointed among the delegates to the June convention." Another contemporary penned a series of articles for

his local paper, detailing the breakdown of old partisanship and rise of new organizations.²⁴

Newspapers as well as voters reflected the breakdown of partisanship. In November, 1850 the Jackson *Southron* became *The Flag of the Union* with new editors, Whig Thomas Palmer and Democrat Dr. Edward Pickett. Some newspapers, formerly aligned with one party or the other, became independent for a time, and later committed to one of the new parties. The *Ripley Advertiser* followed this pattern, finally supporting the Unionists in July, 1851.²⁵ In Columbus, William D. Chapman and J. R. Smith began a new paper, the *Southern Standard*, dedicated to the State-Rights cause. The editors vowed to support southern rights and states' rights independently of either new party, and beyond the current election regardless of the outcome. "It will be the aim of the publishers," Chapman and Smith stated in their first issue, "to elevate the STANDARD above party and the vituperating bitterness of grovelling party spirit and the degrading

²⁴ H. A. Cooke to James E. Cooke, January 11, 1851, H. A. Cooke letters, MDAH; *The Herald and Correspondent*, September 6, 1850; Andrew Hutchinson, Colin S. Tarpley, Ethelbert Barksdale, and T. J. Wharton to Charles D. Fontaine, April 5, 1851, Charles D. Fontaine Papers, MDAH, folder 6; "A Southern Rights Whig," in *The Palladium*, October 17, 1851. The editors of *The Mississippian* also tried to "explain" to Whigs who had joined the State-Rights party that a convention was the best means to organize and ensure victory. Thus while Democrats often ran the State-Rights campaign, they recognized the presence and importance of their new Whig allies. April 18, 1851. See also J. McDonald to John A. Quitman, March 9, 1851, J. F. H. Claiborne Collection, MDAH, box 4, folder 1.

²⁵ *Flag of the Union*, Nov. 22, 1850; *Port Gibson Herald and Correspondent*, November 29, 1850, and July 11, 1851.

vocabulary of partisan demagogues."²⁶ Chapman and Smith remained true to their antiparty principles, criticizing Whigs, Democrats, Unionists, and State Righters until July, when they ultimately endorsed the State-Rights ticket.

The State-Rights party nominated Governor Quitman, arch-secessionist, for governor. His strident support for disunion went beyond his own party's more moderate platform, which preached resistance to the Compromise and defense of southern rights, but did not openly advocate disunion.²⁷ Quitman set the tone for his party, however, despite their platform. Chapman and Smith's *Southern Standard*, in fact, withheld their endorsement of Quitman until July, precisely because they deprecated disunion. The editors wanted to form yet another new party—one committed to Southern Rights but opposed to disunion. The Union party chose Senator Foote to run for governor and filled the state ticket with other Democrats, demonstrating to voters that they were not simply the Whigs in disguise. Foote, an accomplished stump speaker, got the better of his

²⁶ *Southern Standard*, Feb. 1, 1851. In his first assessment of the Compromise issues, editor Chapman had appealed to the same antiparty spirit. The Compromise, he said, encompassed "issues over-riding party, and in their discussion we desire that the shibboleth of party be cast aside." He further issued a "grand proclamation" calling for "the unity of factions" in all sectional questions. "It is now, as it has been for two years past, our settled determination to rise above party, and merge these Southern issues into general issues." *Monroe Democrat*, Oct. 2 and 9, 1850.

²⁷ Many State-Rights men apparently preferred Jefferson Davis to Quitman as the gubernatorial nominee. Quitman, elected in 1849, had had to resign before his term expired because he was indicted by the federal government for filibustering (violation of U. S. neutrality laws) in Cuba. Cleared of those charges, Quitman thought he deserved a chance to redeem himself. The State-Rights party, still under the sway of Democratic men, bowed to the appeals of their former governor. The party's platform, moderate compared to Quitman, reflected the influence of Jeff Davis. See Donald Rawson, "Party Politics in Mississippi," Ph.D. Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1964, 213-15.

opponent in a series of debates. The two actually came to blows in Sledgeville, prompting cancellation of the remainder of their joint speaking tour.²⁸

The Union party achieved a substantial victory in the September election for delegates. They won forty-one of fifty-nine counties, giving them a controlling majority in the convention. Quitman correctly viewed the outcome as a personal rebuke as well as a vote against secession, and resigned the canvass for governor. States-Rights activists eagerly accepted his withdrawal and convinced Jefferson Davis to replace him. Davis and the party press worked hard to convince voters that secession was no longer an issue, although the opposition worked equally hard to remind voters that Davis's candidacy made no difference--it was still union or disunion. The State Righters made more and more appeals to past partisanship as the election grew near, hoping to exploit the state's Democratic majority. Given another month Davis might have overcome Foote, but the Unionists had too large a lead, winning the governor's chair by one thousand votes.

The Union party's victory depended in large measure on the destruction of old party loyalties. If it had been simply the old Whig party then defeat was inevitable. But when issues of sectionalism became paramount, voters ignored partisanship and felt compelled to abandon the old organizations. As one citizen summarized: "The whigs say

²⁸ Henry S. Foote, *Casket of Reminiscences* (Washington, D. C.: Chronicle Publishing Co., 1874). He called Quitman the "dullest and most prosy speaker I have ever known" (356). Reuben Davis declared Foote to be "the best stump speaker then living," while Quitman was "poor and flat." *Recollections of Mississippi and Mississippians*, 317. Even his own party ridiculed Quitman's style as too much that of a "belles lettres scholar" and not the simple, untutored speech they expected from an "old soldier." *The Mississippian*, July 25, 1851.

it is immaterial to them, whether they are called whigs or democrats, if they are doing battle in the right cause; so says the democrats."²⁹ Both parties, in fact, relied on what spokesmen perceived as a widespread distrust of party organization and professional politicians. Editor F. G. Baldwin of the Unionist *Primitive Republican* considered his new party a temporary organization whose life should not continue after the current election. "[W]e would consider its [the Union party's] unnecessary and invidious continuence [sic] as the source of much evil." Baldwin, normally an independent editor, represented the extreme end of antipartyism in Mississippi, but normally partisan editors likewise appealed to the voters' hostility. "Party drill" seemed so essential to the State-Rights partisans, claimed another Unionist editor, that they cannot conceive of "honest" voters working independently of "spoils-hungry politicians." State-Rights spokesmen used the same logic in attacking the Unionists. "Union" was a good name for the party, they said, because it was a "union of disaffected and disappointed politicians" bound together for one object: duping innocent voters in order to get elected and feed from the public trough.³⁰ Thus, running throughout the rhetoric of 1850-51 was a strong current of antiparty sentiment, expressed equally by spokesmen for both parties, and reflecting not only the reality of tenuous partisanship among ordinary voters but also a widely perceived lack of faith in professional "huckster" politicians and the machinations of conventions and caucuses.

²⁹ "Americanus," in the *Southern Standard*, Oct. 18, 1851.

³⁰ *The Primitive Republican*, April 3, 24, and June 12, 1851; *Flag of the Union*, May 2, July 23, 1851; *Mississippi Palladium*, July 11, 1851.

The speeches, editorials, and letters of Mississippians likewise revealed why they had different reactions to the Compromise. The rhetoric and symbols used during the crisis indicated that cultural values of honor, manliness, and family integrity were central to the political culture. Spokesmen invoked these fundamental ethics because they helped define male culture and resonated with their listeners. The language of honor was evident in the discourse of both parties and central to all discussion of Free Soil. The difference between supporters and opponents of the 1850 Compromise was that the former simply believed southern honor had not been insulted. Conversely, the State-Rights party perceived the admission of California and abolition of the slave trade in Washington, D. C. as unacceptable to regional pride. These men saw the Compromise measures of 1850-51 in the same manner as they would the Republican party in 1860-61. By the time of Lincoln's election, most Mississippians agreed with the resisters' interpretation and carried their state out of the Union in a popular crusade.

Those who supported the State-Rights party believed that the antislavery implications of California's statehood represented insults too gross for Southerners to suffer. These Compromise measures, they asserted, designated the South and her people as inferior to those in the free North. California's free soil constitution, proclaimed Representative Albert Gallatin Brown, made an "insulting discrimination ... between southern and northern people." He relayed to his constituents the Northern "threat" to impose the Wilmot Proviso if southerners rejected the Compromise. "Let them pass it," Brown said, "it will not be more galling than this." One Democratic meeting lashed out at the "insulting audacity" of Northerners who argued "the evils and the sin of slavery by

defamatory harangues against slave owners, . . . in which they are presented to the world as heartless tyrants . . . or pirates and robbers."³¹ Significantly, of course, these men emphasized the slur on their own character, not criticism of the institution itself. To accept such insults would mean personal dishonor and humiliation, and consequently they counseled aggressive, even violent resistance.³²

The resolutions from one district convention summarized many of these southern complaints. Furthermore, this particular meeting was in the state's northernmost first district, and included representatives from largely nonslaveholding counties. Their objections made clear that these Mississippi men, at least, considered the stain of free soil a personal insult—one that had little to do with the institution itself, but which questioned the moral character of all southerners. "[W]e have been abused and insulted by every form of expression deemed best adapted to that end," they began. "Excited discussion of the evils and the sin of slavery by defamatory harangues against the slave owners of the South" have denounced them as an un-Christian stain on the national character. Mississippians should unite, they concluded, regardless of former party loyalties and in "bonded

³¹ *The Organizer*, June 9, 1849.

³² For men bound by honor, insults to the community or family and insults to themselves were indistinguishable. The community conferred status and reputation for individuals, but if the community's good name was called into question, then so would one's own claim to honor fall apart. Similarly, a slur to one's own reputation called into question the honor of one's family, neighborhood, and ultimately state and region: those groups had conferred honor, and if someone else questioned that sanction then the group's own position was suspect. As David Gilmore notes: Honor and shame are reciprocal moral values representing primordial integration of individual to 'group'. They reflect, respectively, the conferral of public esteem upon the person and the sensitivity to public opinion upon which the former depends." Quoted in *Honor and Shame*, 3.

brotherhood" to defend their sacred honor and constitutional rights. Finally, northern critics should not mistake the South's "gentle measures of remonstrance" for "pusillanimity, or as evidence of final submission." In short, Mississippi's men were insulted by northern criticism leveled against their social system, accusations that questioned their claim to be good Christians and men of equality within the American brotherhood.³³

State-Rights partisans, in fact, habitually referred to their opponents as the "submissionist" party, or simply the "subs." This epithet succinctly conveyed their opinion of anyone who supported the Compromise: a weakling who "bowed to the yoke" of the northern majority and was not "man enough" to resist.³⁴ Unfailingly did State-Rights men used the same language--humiliating, degrading, insulting. The question, they asked again and again, was whether Mississippians would "submit" to the "oppression" of northern insults and "bow their heads," bending "suppliant" knees to the "yoke" of northern mastery and accept a "prostrate South;" or would the State "manfully vindicate" its rights under the Constitution as an equal partner to the national covenant. Men from Holmes County summarized the attitude of most State-Rights groups when they asserted that free

³³ *The Organizer*, June 9, 1849.

³⁴ Another favorite term for the Unionists was "dirt-eater," obviously playing on the secessionist nickname of "fire-eater." A dirt eater implied someone who grovelled in the lowest, most unmanly fashion, willing to submit to humiliation and disgrace, a weakling. On the meaning of words, in particular the concept of "latent meaning" (or "deep" meaning), see esp. David Riesman and Nathan Glazer, "The Meaning of Opinion," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 12 (Winter 1948-49), 633-648.

soil was "grossly unjust to the South, and for Southern men tamely to submit thereto, is to make themselves accessories [sic] to their own dishonor."³⁵

The issue of honor, in this case, was bound up with the equality of states under the Constitution, usually referred to as simply "states rights." When Southerners spoke of Constitutional equality for their states, in other words, they meant more than simply a legal impartiality. If one's state was treated as unequal and unworthy of brotherhood with other states, the insult went beyond a judicial abstraction of rights "as the founding fathers" decreed them. The taint of inequality reached to one's community, and ultimately to home and family. Jefferson Davis often blended images of manliness, equality, community, and family. Their cause "was a right and holy one," Davis preached in the small town of Fayette, one that men would maintain against all odds "to protect their honor and their equality, that they might transmit to their descendants the same heritage which had been given to themselves."³⁶ Representative Jacob Thompson used the same

³⁵ Albert G. Brown, "A Letter to His Constituents," May 13, 1850, and Speech at Ellwood Springs, November 2, 1850, both in M. W. Cluskey, ed., *Speeches, Messages, and Other Writings of the Hon. Albert G. Brown, A Senator in Congress from the State of Mississippi* (Philadelphia: Jas. B. Smith and Co., 1859); *The Mississippian*, March 1, 1851. Other examples include *The Mississippian*, Oct. 25, 1850, in which State-Rights committeeman Charles D. Fontaine warned his fellow Mississippians that they must resist "northern aggression" or "meekly bow in passive submission to the humiliating castigation;" *The Monroe Democrat*, Oct. 20, 1851 or April 2, 1851. The latter included a letter with the affirmation that any southerner who "fears to defend the sober promptings of his reason, because of [cowardly] prejudice or dreaded calumny, is a coward in the eyes of God; untrue to himself, and derelict in his duty to his fellow men."

³⁶ Speech at Fayette, July 11, 1851, in the *Natchez Mississippi Free Trader*, reprinted in Lynda Lasswell Crist, Mary Seaton Dix, and Richard E. Beringer, eds., *The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Volume 4: 1849-1852* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 209.

symbolism: "Will we leave to our children the task of resistance; a task which we had not the manliness and courage to perform ourselves?" Not only national leaders, but local politicians likewise appealed to values of family, honor, and community. Lafayette county representative James Brown admonished his listeners that this was "the time when every man who feels an interest in the future safety of himself, his family, and property" should rally to the defense of community rights and community honor.³⁷ Politics was the obvious, most visible stage from which men could assert their manliness and defend their community and family, no less than themselves, against the "outrageous insults" of northern "fanatics." The "State-Rights" party name, then, could convey a number of convictions other than simply a theory of constitutional creation.

The opponents of the Compromise also questioned the Unionists's masculinity. They ridiculed their opponents' "spirit of pusillanimity" and spoke of a "craven, contemptible fear" of resistance. Representative Brown hinted at cowardice when he asked: "Have we sunk so low that we dare not complain of wrongs like these, lest the cry of disunion shall be rung in our ears?" Jeff Davis declared his critics "cowards" and claimed "he was unable to find one of them who had ever lost a drop of blood in defence of his country." Physical courage, the willingness to risk life and limb for the sake of honor, was a cardinal virtue of southern manhood. Davis even defied the voters to forsake him. One newspaper reported that if defeated he claimed "he would say nothing, nor would he have

³⁷ *The Organizer*, June 23, 1849, Nov. 2, 1850.

aught to regret save their [the voters'] own unmanly courage and deep humiliation."³⁸ Editor Benjamin F. Dill accused the "craven submissionists" of having "livers white as milk," and pursuing a "degrading and ruinous policy of mean-spirited submission." Finally, one writer suggested that if the compromisers discovered their "hearts still faint," then "let them exchange clothes with their mothers, wives, sisters and daughters, and send them out to support the honor of the South!"³⁹

The Union press responded in similar fashion, repeating at length how much more "manly" their platform and position was, when compared to the "impotent petulance" and "bravado" of "huckster politicians." They also ridiculed the State Righters truculence about southern honor. "The truth is, we are too sensitive--too timid & touchy in relation to this institution of slavery," declared one Unionist.⁴⁰ Both sides, then, articulated the dominant masculine culture and its imperative assertions of vitality and physical courage. The Union party could not, as members of the same political culture, accept the label of submissionist

³⁸ Speech at Ellwood Springs, in Cluskey, ed., *Speeches, Messages, and Other Writings of the Hon. Albert G. Brown*, 250. Crist, Dix, and Beringer, eds., *The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Volume 4*, 207, 212.

³⁹ *The Organizer*, November 2, 1850; *The Constitution*, July 12, 1851. Another instance of gendered imagery was the often-used symbolism of rape. Southerners routinely referred to their region in the feminine--"her honor," for example--and many opponents of the Compromise extended the metaphor, perhaps unconsciously. Jefferson Davis, among others, repeatedly used the phrase "to lie supinely on our backs" when describing what the Unionists asked them to do. In short, to accept the "humiliation" and "shame," to use the masculine language of honor, of complete helplessness. See for example, his speech at Raymond, Aug. 5, 1851, quoted in *The Mississippiian*, Aug. 8, 1851.

⁴⁰ *Vicksburg Weekly Whig*, April 2, 1851. See also *Columbus Democrat*, March 8, 1851.

or accept the proposition that the Compromise degraded southern honor. Thus, Unionists denied that the South had been insulted. The Union paper in Port Gibson admitted that one could, in fact, argue that the Compromise was inequitable, on paper, but the intent was "honorable and just." In other words, the North was trying to be fair and intended no insult. One reader wrote his town's editor with similar sentiments. The Compromise measures had not affronted Southern honor and he did not consider himself an "aggrieved party." Although, if that were the case, he agreed that he would opt for immediate secession. One Union candidate for state legislature voiced similar concerns when he contended that southerners could remain in the Union without damage to "our honor, and with our manly dignified independence" intact. But if they accepted any real insults, then they would deserve "the appellation of submissionists, than which no epithet can be more odious, none more repugnant to the feelings, to the sensibilities, and to the manly pride of freemen." The Unionists of Cayuga precinct, in Hinds County, summarized this argument: the Compromise might not be everything the South wanted, "but we do believe that we can remain in the Union without in the slightest degree compromising our honor, diminishing our prosperity, or jeopardizing our safety."⁴¹ This strategy was not lost on the Unionists's opponents. "It is a singular fact reader," declared one State-Rights editor, "that all the friends of the compromise measures, expend all their arguments in proving that the

⁴¹ *Vicksburg Weekly Whig*, July 9, 1851. The candidate was Gibeon Gibson of Vicksburg. *Hinds County Gazette*, Sept. 11, 1851. Other examples include the resolutions of the public meeting in Chulahoma (Marshall county), in the *Holly Springs Gazette*, Nov. 15, 1850; *Columbus Democrat*, April 4, 1851; *Vicksburg Weekly Whig*, Oct. 16, 1850.

South has not actually been disgraced, and that she by acquiescing in them, does not dishonor herself."⁴²

Other Unionist tactics likewise demonstrated the pervasiveness of values associated with honor and manliness. Congressional candidate Benjamin D. Nabors argued that only the Unionists could stop Mississippi from "disgracing herself." State-Rights partisans, he claimed, were making demands to which they knew the North would never accede. This would force Mississippi either to secede and be "ruined," or back down and be disgraced. (Of course in 1861 the options were basically the same, and Mississippians consciously chose ruin over disgrace.) "A leading object with me from the commencement," Nabors recounted, "has been to save Mississippi from committing herself to any issue, from which the force of circumstances would oblige her to recede [and thus be disgraced]." This was exactly the position, he finished, in which South Carolina now found itself: "Supposing she now recedes, will she not lose to some extent, her own self respect and the confidence of her neighbors?"⁴³ Thus, Nabors argued, only the Union Party strategy of calm

⁴² *The Herald and Correspondent*, Oct. 11, 1850 and March 7, 1851. Other examples include the *Southern Standard*, May 10, 1851; *The Palladium*, July 25, 1851. This Unionist defense of their honor was at the root of all those long debates about the legality of California's constitution and admission to the Union. If the procedure was fair and legal then southerners had no cause to complain--they might not like it, but it was "honorable." And therefore the Compromise of 1850, including the admission of California, was honorable as well. Conversely, State-Rights spokesmen hammered away at the "shadowy circumstances" surrounding California's constitution: in particular, were there enough legal residents in the territory?

⁴³ *Columbus Democrat*, July 12, 1851.

deliberation and careful, but "manly" remonstrance would uphold and satisfy the honor of the South.

The two sides' constant wrangling over who were really the "submissionists" also indicated the potency of honor and manliness within the political culture. Unionists insisted that the term actually applied to their opponents. "Who are the true submissionists?" asked countless editorials. One editor quoted from Webster's definition of a "slink," indicating a man who "creeps away meanly," to show the "natural identification" of the true slinks in this controversy--anyone who would abandon the republic and all the South's investment and heritage was truly the slinking submissionist. Another Unionist indicted his opponents with their own language when some State-Rights spokesmen denied that they advocated secession. They maintain that the Compromise is morally wrong and insulting, he argued, yet now say they will not secede? "Is this not submission in the opprobrious sense of the term? When were freemen known before to submit to wrongs, when they were in possession of a clear and "essential" remedy?"⁴⁴ Thus, both sides worked hard to pin the accusation of "unmanly submission" on one another; if it stuck, there would be no worse indignity for men of honor.

That the insult of Free Soil went beyond mere bravado or notions of physical courage, however, was evident in references to religion and Christianity. "The northern brethren, a people so pure, so christian, so sensitively holy," hissed one editor, have determined "that affiliation with brothers who hold slaves [has] darkened their path

⁴⁴ *The Primitive Republican*, July 17, 1851; *Vicksburg Weekly Whig*, July 23, 1851.

towards the gates of Paradise." The 1849 Democratic third district convention resolved that the Free Soil movement denounced slavery "as a flagrant violation of the laws of God, or religion and of humanity; and we are assured that this foul stain upon the National character, must not, shall not continue." Hinds County's delegation to the 1849 October convention said that Northerners had tried "to brand us with moral sin, and to deny us the privileges of christian fellowship with our brethren of the North."⁴⁵

⁴⁵ *Southern Standard*, May 31, 1851; *The Mississippian*, July 20, 1849. Another Democratic convention expressed their indignation at Northern insults which "denounced [slavery] as a flagrant violation of the laws of God, of religion, and of humanity, and we are assured that this foul stain upon the National character shall not continue." *The Organizer*, June 9, 1849. These appeals to Christianity are in some way related to the "non-competitive" part of honor most divorced from aggressive ideals of masculinity (physical prowess, economic success). Wyatt-Brown includes this in his discussion of "gentility," which included "sociability, learning, and piety." To some extent, he argues, all of these characteristics applied to all southerners, but learning and piety were particularly the domain of elites. After the Second Great Awakening, piety assumed a greater importance. See *Southern Honor*, esp. 88-114. But men should not show too much piety, or risk being labelled "feminine"--churchgoing was especially part of the female sphere. The northern "insult" to southerners' claims to good Christianity, then, should be seen as an attack not only on male honor, but critically as a slur on family, including female, honor. Put another way: if the South were not Christian, then one's wife and daughters were not good Christians. Others who employ honor as an analytical category debate how much the ethic varies by social class. Peristiany and Julian Pitt-Rivers distinguish between "honor of precedence," associated with elites and defined by power over others; and "honor of virtue" for everyone else, which includes honesty, loyalty, and a concern for moral turpitude. See Peristiany, ed., *Honour and Shame*. This distinction seems on the one hand murky and on the other too exclusive--both of these categories apply to all men of honor. Pitt-Rivers made the distinction more subtle in a subsequent work, co-edited with J. G. Peristiany, *Honor and Grace in Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). He now distinguished between "honor owed to God" vs. "honor owed to other men." The former, defined by the Church, centered in a guilt-free conscience (honor in the eyes of God only); while the latter remained, more familiarly, concerned with "the pecking order," physical courage, and masculinity. "Honor owed to God," it seems, comes close to our modern notion of "dignity," although it was, he concludes, still related to "virtue" (something close to Wyatt-Brown's gentility, with "honesty" thrown in). This "refinement" (confusion, perhaps) of the honor concept has led

Personal honor included the affirmation of moral behavior, and Free Soilers denied that the Southern way of life was moral. William Sharkey, president of the bipartisan state convention in 1849, informed his fellow Mississippians that the North had declared slavery to be a political and a moral evil. "Let them eradicate moral evils from their own land; we can take care of our own morals," Sharkey said. "I must admonish my Methodist and my Baptist friends to be on their guard," he continued, "you may soon be told that your religion [itself] is a moral evil, and must be exterminated." Finally he concluded, this "moral evil, it seems, is exclusively in the South, and those who have determined it to be so, and wish to eradicate it, reside [only] in the North." Mississippians responded to the insults of Free Soil with one voice, as Sharkey, Whig and Unionist, demonstrated. It was their interpretation of the Compromise of 1850 drew the lines of partisanship.⁴⁶

The dictates of honor and a public culture of masculinity, then, defined the political discourse of the sectional and Compromise crises. Editors and politicians used this language because it resounded with their readers and listeners--they were all men of the same culture and the same political culture. The partisan cleavage of 1850-51 largely

some, most notably Michael Herzfeld, to conclude that honor has become too unmanageable. One of his alternatives is "hospitality," which he argues is a more pervasive value than ill-defined "honor." See "'As in Your Own House': Hospitality, Ethnography, and the Stereotype of Mediterranean Society," in Gilmore, ed., *Honor and Shame*, 75-89.

⁴⁶ *The Mississippian*, Oct. 12, 1849. Jefferson Davis used similar language: "Religion has been perverted from its mission of peace, good will, and brotherly love to sanctify this unprovoked hostile aggression, and the word of God offered as authority for the commission of half the crimes defined by the Decologue." Crist, Dix, and Beringer, eds., *The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Volume 4*, 280.

depended on whether or not one considered the Compromise too insulting to accept. Those men who disavowed the adjustment measures considered it degrading to themselves and therefore to their community. Ten years later, the Republican party's "offensive" platform would convince a majority of Mississippians that northerners no longer considered them honorable, Christian men.

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This first sectional crisis demonstrated many of the characteristics of Mississippi's political culture. It showed that antiparty sentiments remained vital in 1850 and that party lines were fluid. In statewide elections Democrats and Whigs in great numbers renounced their previous affiliation and took up the banner of new organizations. The Compromise crisis also revealed the central place of honor within southern culture, and in politics. As the most visible and prominent public forum in one's community, politics was the ideal stage from which to assert one's character and masculinity, in defense of family, town, state, and region. But was it only the sectional crisis which threw into relief these characteristics in the political culture? Or were community, honor, and antipartyism always salient features in Mississippi politics? The following chapters will demonstrate that these attributes of the political culture were not unique to times of sectional strife. Rather, Mississippi's political system remained essentially antiparty and community-based until secession, contradicting those historians who envision stable party loyalties, rigid adherence to organization, and partisanship based on ideological grounds. When combined with the political rhetoric and values of southern honor, and in the face of a suddenly dominant Republican party in 1860, this political culture fostered a powerful, popular

crusade to leave the Union. One crucial element in that political culture was a widespread distrust and resentment of party organizations and professional politicians--an attitude that turned virtually all meaningful political conflict into a personal matter.

CHAPTER 3

THE POLITICS OF ANTIPARTYISM

The instability of 1849-51 demonstrated that party loyalties remained tenuous enough to be disrupted and remade within a few months. Even without northern criticism to unify Southern attitudes, political activists, newspaper editors, and other public observers voiced antiparty sentiments throughout the 1840s and 1850s. The majority Democrats professedly committed to conventions, caucuses, and the other staples of party organization, but their party suffered from ongoing intrastate regionalism throughout the antebellum period. The Democrats's various opponents were more conspicuously antiparty, and consistently made it a central theme in their public appeals. Furthermore, both sides forever accused the other of demagoguery, seeking election merely for the spoils of victory. This persistent campaign tactic showed that, among the general populace at least, there remained a steady current of distrust and dissatisfaction with partisan politics. Critically, rejecting parties as a legitimate means through which public disputes could be settled, men ensured that a series of highly personal relationships characterized political conflict. As both parties habitually invoked rhetoric and values that tapped their

constituents' deep-seated fear and distrust of "rigid party organization" and professional politicians, the "politics of antipartyism" helped define Mississippi's political culture.¹

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Following the highly charged 1851 campaign and Union victory, many former Whigs and Democrats met to choose delegates for their respective party's national conventions, preceding the upcoming presidential election. After much confusion and uncertainty, leaders of both the old parties decided to return, for the most part, to their former loyalties at the national level. The Democrats seemed most divided, since more of their men had left the party during the preceding year's turmoil. State-Rights leaders Jefferson Davis and John A. Quitman voiced particular disappointment with the reunion of the Democracy's two factions.

Davis, in a letter written soon after the Democratic national convention, praised the State-Rights party as more devoted to principle (rather than "base partisanship") than any

¹ Like William Cooper's "politics of slavery," then, I argue that the rhetoric of both Whigs and Democrats was essentially the same. It indicates no ideological cleavage between them, but rather a common perspective. See *The Politics of Slavery 1828-1856* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1978). The alternative position that southern Whigs and Democrats represented different world-views is articulated by, among others: J. Mills Thornton, III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), and Harry L. Watson, *Jacksonian Politics and Community Conflict: The Emergence of the Second American Party System in Cumberland County, North Carolina* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1981). Another study that points out the antiparty rhetoric common to both Whigs and Democrats is J. William Harris, *Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society: White Liberty and Black Slavery in Augusta's Hinterlands* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1985), esp. 127-128. Most works, however, tend to argue that only Whigs made antipartyism a major tenet of faith. See, for example, Thomas Brown, "Southern Whigs and the Politics of Statesmanship, 1833-1841," *Journal of Southern History* 46 (Aug. 1980), 361-380.

organization of which he had been a member. This commitment, he said, "sustained me and made mine a labor of love until I sunk exhausted." Davis expressed confidence in Franklin Pierce as a devotee of limited construction and concluded that the South had "the best chance of security through the democratic party." But he warned that should it fail, he would quickly abandon it and try to sustain an all-southern organization.² Quitman articulated even greater outrage at the ease with which State-Rights Democrats returned to the national party. He deemed such political malleability, for the sake of electoral victory, to be notions unworthy of true patriots and statesmen. "I am a Democrat, because democracy has heretofore sustained state rights," he wrote, but "[w]hen it shall cease to do so, the name will have no charm for me." The former governor was incensed that supposed State-Rights men would cede principle merely to defeat the hated Governor Foote. "Foote is now assailed, not for his agency in robbing us of the public domain, and stigmatizing our institutions by odious discrimination," but for abandoning the Democrats and helping form the Union party. State-Rights men refused to discuss the Compromise measures, in the interest of "party harmony." He concluded that "[t]he hard blow of a defeat and exclusion from office makes them sensitive at the very idea of state rights."³ Quitman later speculated that this commitment to principle had probably finished his

² Letter to [heading lost], August-October, 1852, in Lynda Lasswell Crist, Mary Seaton Dix, and Richard E. Beringer, eds., *The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Volume 4: 1849-1852* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 294-297.

³ Quoted in J. F. H. Claiborne, *Life and Correspondence of John A. Quitman* (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1860), 161-2. See also Quitman's speech before the state Democratic convention, 1852, and the letter from Judge E. C. Wilkinson to John A. Quitman, both in Claiborne, *John A. Quitman*, 152; 177.

political career: antipathy for partyism "would not suit the times," he concluded. "I can sustain my position against every thing [sic] but gold or office--these I fear constitute the democracy of many political managers." Quitman, then, articulated a feeling of betrayal among State-Rights party regulars who refused to "sell out" and rejoin a national Democratic party committed to the Compromise of 1850.⁴

Former governor Quitman was not the only Mississippian who expressed distaste for the "gold or office" so dear to these "political managers." Accusations of demagoguery filled the partisan press and animated public discourse. Even in private correspondence, Mississippians lamented the practice of "electioneering." One observer summed up his feelings with a timeless complaint: "Office seeking has become a professional business;" a sentiment apparently shared by many of his contemporaries.⁵

The distaste for professional politicians made easy fodder for public speakers on different occasions. Educator Samuel M. Meek, in a lecture before the Odd Fellows, complained of modern demagogues concerned only with money and office. "[H]is greatest mental effort," Meek accused the politician, is "paper politics--he squabbles over a County election as if the fate of the nation were involved--and his only contribution to social enjoyment & improvement" consisted of whispering in the ears of ladies. The speaker continued, blaming politics for taking too much time from men's devotion to literature and

⁴ Letter from John A. Quitman to C. R. Clifton, November 18, 1853, J. F. H. Claiborne Collection, Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH), Jackson, MS, box 5, folder 6.

⁵ "Our Country," in *Oakland College Magazine (OCM)*, November 1856, Oakland College Papers, MDAH, Box 6, Folder unnumbered, between 104 and 105.

the arts, thus retarding social progress and refinement. The obsession with political advancement and money, Meek concluded, contributed to the South's lack of higher learning.⁶

To some antebellum Mississippians, a demagogue represented the ultimate perversion of political liberty and statesmanship, and the result of consuming ambition. "The corruption manifested in every station of public life and those fierce bands of demagogues who are sowing the seeds of dissension," complained one author, represented the highest degree of selfishness and grasping ambition. These designing politicians, in other words, played on divisions and emotions within the public simply to get elected and satisfy their personal lust for "gold or office," without concern for the welfare of society.⁷ The demagogue, critics preached, envied true statesmen, "independent and honest politician[s]" who think only of the common good, not personal satisfaction. The

⁶ Address before the Odd Fellows, Collegiate High School at Columbus, Mississippi, October 1852 or August 1853, Meek and Family Papers, MDAH, box 3, folder 24.

⁷ "Ambition," in *OCM*, March 1858, 9-11, Oakland College Papers, box 6, folder 111. In this case, the author is obviously speaking of Republicans who are agitating the slavery issue for their own advancement, and less explicitly, the fire-eaters of the South as well. The author of "Political Liberty Ends in Despotism" was more straightforward in his inclusion of the fire-eaters among the ranks of demagogues. "If we are true to ourselves, we may preserve our republic for years; but if we tamely submit to that despotism of thought which now galls us if we suffer fanaticism to reign unchecked, and ourselves to become willing tools in the hands of our party leaders, our days will soon be numbered." *OCM*, February 1858, 20, Oakland College Papers, box 6, folder 110.

companion to this accusation was the often-made charge that virtue and statesmanship had declined since the Revolutionary generation.⁸

The partisan press likewise contained endless accusations of demagoguery. It remained a standard tactic to accuse one's opponent of pandering to public fears in order to get elected. At the very least, these continuous allegations demonstrated that political activists sensed a repugnance to party politics and office-seekers among the voters. One Whig editor's attack on Representative Albert Gallatin Brown was typical. "The upright politician is to be admired, but one who will turn as many ways in the course of six months as there [are] votes to gain, has not our confidence." Brown and his party, the editor commented again, "appear as variable as the wind and study the popular breeze as closely as their capacities allow." He had tried to follow exactly what Brown advocated, but concluded the truth was "they have peculiar creeds for peculiar localities and peculiar times."⁹

⁸ "Our Country," in *OCM*, November 1856, Oakland College Papers, box 6, folder unnumbered. On the "statesman ideal" in southern politics, see esp. Kenneth Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen: The Political Culture of American Slavery* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).

⁹ *The Herald and Correspondent*, August 1, 1851; August 22, 1851. For a few other examples, see *The Southern Standard* (Columbus), August and September, 1852, especially relating to Winfield Scott; *The Mississippian and State Gazette* (Jackson), July 21, 1858, editorial on the "bore oratorical," who appears as a "common nuisance" in every canvass and convention; Jefferson Davis' exchange with Henry Foote, in *The Mississippian and Flag of the Union*, January 29, February 6, 1852; and Reverend William Winans public letter in *The Herald and Correspondent*, September 28, 1849: "I cannot reconcile it to my sense of propriety to engage in an electioneering canvass, or to solicit suffrage for an office of honor"; among numerous examples. On the issue of whether or not newspapers are representative of "public opinion," see M. Brewster Smith, "Opinions, Personality, and Political Behavior," *The American Political Science Review* 52 (March

Expressions of distaste for electioneering office seekers were not limited to public speeches and editorials, however. Equally in private did Mississippians complain of the hated practice. Even such an active partisan as William R. Cannon, Democrat from Columbus, disapproved of such blatant jockeying for position. "So many hungry politicians desire place," he complained, "that no pains are spared to pull down all above them, in order to fall into the scramble, & they [party leaders] even go so far as to say, that they will vote for no man who w[ill] not ask for office."¹⁰ Another potential candidate expressed nothing but "unmitigated contempt" for politicians interested only in personal advancement and not public service. This Democrat felt qualified to be Secretary of State, but refused to campaign for the nomination. "I could not reconcile it with a proper sense of delicacy to endeavor to obtain the nomination." He concluded that party leaders considered the office as simply a "party reward."¹¹ Such stock rhetoric, of course, was also common among frustrated office-seekers or used by others to clothe naked ambition in

1958), 1-25. He summarizes: "'Public opinion' implies not so much the contrast between public vs. private circumstances of expression, as the existence of *consensually defined issues* in the social group whose opinions are under consideration" (15). This notion of the relationship between the words of public spokesmen and cultural values held by "the masses" is also discussed in the Introduction. See esp. notes 17, 18, 19, and 21.

¹⁰ Letter from William R. Cannon to Jefferson Davis, December 12, 1855, in Lynda Lasswell Crist and Mary Seaton Dix, eds. *The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Volume 5: 1853-1855* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 145 (emphasis original). Others include Hiram Cassedy to J. F. H. Claiborne, July 17, 1855, MDAH. "I am heartily disgusted with the machinery and the players, of that trickery art called politicks."

¹¹ J. McDonald to Richard Griffith, September 6, 1854, Griffith Papers, MDAH.

respectable language. Even delivered disingenuously, though, these sentiments indicated that men believed their readers expected such ritual deference to mainstream antiparty perspective.

Criticism of "professional" politicians blended easily into a general feeling of dissatisfaction with the caucuses and conventions that often selected state and district candidates. "The demagogue is a factious leader of the people," wrote one critic, but the demagogue himself was not solely to blame. Observers such as this one indicted the entire apparatus that conspired to put these designing men before the public. Committeemen and newspaper editors were a big part of the problem. "Perhaps there could not be devised a more effectual means of perverting the true principles of democracy," ventured one Mississippian, "than our present system of caucuses and conventions." Such means of selecting candidates alienated true statesmen and effectively shut out the working classes. Farmers and mechanics had no access to these secretive caucuses, and even if chosen as a delegate to some far-away convention, usually lacked the time and money to attend. "This false initiatory step [of conventions]," he concluded "vitiates the whole process" of democracy.¹² The convention system, opponents of parties charged, limited participation to a privileged few who had the time, money, and interest to work at politics the whole year. As conventions constituted the essence of party organization, many contemporaries logically equated them with parties in general. In other words, antebellum Mississippians

¹² "The Demagogue," in *OCM*, July 1856, Oakland College Papers, box 6, folder 104.

who registered their opposition to the convention system in fact declared a stern antipartyism.

The partisan press routinely included expressions of disgust toward the convention system. Colonel James L. Herbert, candidate for state legislature in Monroe county, complained of the back-room deviousness that denied him a chance for the State-Rights nomination in 1851. Herbert protested that in the preceding few months he had "not been as active as some have been, to fix up tricks, with which to control caucuses." Consequently, "a little squad" of party insiders "juggled" the nominations in a caucus held the morning of the county convention. Herbert went on to ridicule the county chairman's later call for candidates during the afternoon meeting: "Why, he should have said that the nominations had been made--that the caucus had done that much for the people, and," he finished, "the present meeting had just been called in to ratify--to approve the veritable action of the caucus, which had just usurped the powers of the convention." With the public's chance to express its sentiments thwarted by party hacks, Herbert vowed to continue as an independent candidate.¹³

The objections of Colonel Herbert, of course, may have been sour grapes at his own misfortune. Yet he evidently believed the public would sympathize with his complaints about caucus jugglers. Party insiders echoed Herbert's sentiments. As the Democratic caucus debated who to put forward as their choice for U. S. Senator in 1853, Colin Tarpley warned Jefferson Davis that Governor Foote might try to arouse the public's

¹³ *Monroe Democrat*, Aug. 6, 1851.

distrust of such meetings. Tarpley speculated that Foote would try to arouse the voters' antipathy to secret nominations and thus campaign "over the head" of the party organization--classic populist, antiparty tactics. On another occasion, Hiram Van Eaton confided to a friend that he feared nominating a Democratic candidate for District Attorney because "[o]ur county is averse to such things & I am afraid to meddle with it."¹⁴

Editors likewise voiced the public dissatisfaction with conventions. One Whig expressed his approval of Henry Gray's "nomination" for Congress without the need of a convention. "We are glad of this, because in some counties strong prejudice exists against caucuses and conventions; and a candidate thus nominated must consequently lose many votes which he would otherwise receive."¹⁵ Some Democrats, despite their party's traditional reliance on conventions, remained less than enthusiastic. Partisan James Phelan accused the "Jackson clique" of foul play when it chose William Barksdale for Congress over his friend Reuben Davis. "It is a bare faced usurpation, and makes the Convention system, bad enough at best, a mockery. If a caucus can be called to control the

¹⁴ Colin S. Tarpley to Jefferson Davis, May 6, 1853, in Crist and Dix, eds., *The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Volume 5*, 12-14. Hiram S. Van Eaton to William Nicholas Whitehurst, September 10, 1858, Whitehurst Papers, MDAH, box 1, folder 7. Or see the letter of withdrawal from Reuben Davis, in the *Columbus Democrat*, Aug. 4, 1849. Davis began his independent candidacy, he said, because the Whigs had "reaped immense advantage by this denunciation" of nominating conventions and partyism.

¹⁵ *Vicksburg Daily Whig*, May 1, 1849, and on May 3, 1849: "In general caucuses place some family or clique or irresponsible and designing politicians in power, and fasten them so closely and tyrannically upon the people that even an attempt to shake them off always waxes into a miniature revolution and produces evils enumerable [sic] in a community." On Gray's nomination, see also the *Lexington Advertiser*, May, 1849, on the same subject.

Convention," he speculated, "another caucus, may be called to control the caucus, which controls the Convention, and so on indefinitely." Another contemporary claimed that people hated conventions so much that they refused to vote for any "official nominees" just to spite party organizers. "There are hundreds of men in this county who believe that such a thing as a fair nomination is impossible, and would therefore vote against the nominees--no matter how well qualified."¹⁶

Dissatisfaction with the caucus/convention system among Democrats surfaced most evidently in the intrastate regionalism that perpetually threatened the party's fragile unity. State conventions routinely met in the capital, which gave counties close to Jackson an advantage as they could send the most delegates and thus "pack" the assemblies and lobby for "their" men.¹⁷ The "Jackson clique," which centered around the state party newspaper, The Mississippian, exerted much influence on nominations, distant counties naturally resented this practice. What aggravated the rancor was that the party's strength lay in the north and southeast, while Jackson itself was in Whiggish Hinds county. In short, the counties that typically gave the party its majority felt particularly slighted when they saw (in their opinion) men from "opposition districts" claim many of the nominations.¹⁸

¹⁶ *Southern Standard*, July 2, 1853 (emphasis added); *Wilkinson Advertiser*, March 31, 1858.

¹⁷ See, for example, the editorial by Benjamin F. Dill, in *The Organizer*, Jan. 5, 1850.

¹⁸ Other expressions of disgust with the "wire-pulling" machinations of the "Jackson Regency" include *The Weekly Independent*, Nov. 19, 1853. "Again has the Jackson Regency been triumphant. It seems strange indeed that a Cabal, not at all remarkable for numbers or talent, should rule the State of Mississippi, but nevertheless it appears that such

One of the most notorious and well-documented cases of regional dissatisfaction was the so-called "Chickasaw rebellion" of 1853. The census of 1850 indicated that Mississippi deserved another Congressman, due to rapid population growth in the north (often called the "Chickasaw counties" because of the region's former Indian nation). Democrats from the north naturally wanted a man from their region, so long slighted in their opinion, to get the party nomination. When the convention chose William Barksdale of Monroe County over the north's choice, Reuben Davis of Aberdeen, northern Democrats "rebelled."¹⁹ Davis initially agreed to run as an independent candidate, although he later withdrew. His friends in the north, however, complained bitterly that once again their region had been passed over simply to placate party leaders. The editors of the *Southern Standard* pointed out that in the nominating convention Barksdale was suggested by Yazoo county, whose delegation included his brother Harrison Barksdale, and by Holmes county, where he was related by marriage. The *Standard* thus concluded that a concerted effort to defeat Davis came from central and southern Mississippi.²⁰

Davis's friend James Phelan (quoted above on the same subject) offered a different interpretation of this "corrupt bargain." He believed it grew out of the continuing split between Union and State-Rights Democrats, a hangover of the 1851 campaign. Party

is the fact."

¹⁹ James W. McKee, "William Barksdale and the Congressional Election of 1853 in Mississippi," *Journal of Mississippi History* 34 (May 1972); Donald W. Rawson, "Party Politics in Mississippi, 1850-1860," Ph.D. Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1964, 124-127; and the *Monroe Democrat* (Davis' newspaper), June-September, 1853.

²⁰ *Southern Standard*, June 11, 1853.

managers tendered the Unionist Barksdale in exchange for John J. McRea, a State-Rights man, getting the nod for governor. If Davis, also a former State-Rights partisan, had received the Congressional nomination, then the party would need to choose a Unionist for governor. That, however, would send all the other State-Rights aspirants (including McRea) into the U. S. Senate race, upsetting the powerful Albert Gallatin Brown, who desperately coveted the spot.²¹ Either interpretation illustrated that the Democrats suffered from many internal faults. Furthermore, dissatisfied office-seekers proved quite willing to sacrifice party unity and exploit the perceived widespread public distrust of conventions and party hacks. Davis's "mistreatment," in fact, prompted a spate of editorials from north Mississippi Democratic editors against the outrages of "King Caucus." "The managers and clique politicians settled the whole thing while the people didn't have a clue as to what was going on," claimed one editor, and that caucuses "are frauds upon the rights of the people." Finally, he lectured, denouncing the supposed essence of the Democratic party, "conventions are but caucuses on a larger scale."²²

This readiness to invoke the politics of antipartyism extended to include even the most strident partisans. Editor Benjamin F. Dill, one of the only men from either party to advocate county-level nominations, lambasted the "Jackson clique" for trying to force its

²¹ *Ibid.*, July 2, 1853. Numerous Democratic papers in north Mississippi called for a new convention to nominate their own candidate. They accused the Jackson clique of "forcing nominations upon us that are repugnant to our feelings and inclinations, and . . . those acts are but manifestations of a determination to continue to agres [sic] upon rights and through fraudulent means deprive us entirely of our privileges as members of the democratic party." Quoted in the *Yazoo City Weekly Whig*, June 10, 1853.

²² *The American Citizen*, June 4, 1853.

choice for Secretary of State in 1850. "We repeat our objection to a nomination by a few wire-workers who may happen to be in attendance on the Federal Court at Jackson," complained the editor. "This gross abuse of the Convention system, is what has rendered it odious to many good and true democrats of Mississippi;" Dill continued, "and if persisted in, it will, sooner or later bring the whole thing into utter contempt."²³ Thus, even Benjamin Dill, a committed supporter of the convention system, proved perfectly willing to exploit the public's opposition to party organization.

The party's regional problems always lurked just under the veneer of statewide harmony. When Secretary of State Samuel Stamps died in the summer of 1850, the Democrats again degenerated into territorial factionalism. *The Mississippian* endorsed Joseph Bell, a resident of Jackson and interim appointee, in the coming special election. Editors and partisans from around the state responded indignantly that simply because the "Jackson clique" had decided upon a candidate, the whole party would not supinely concur. The *Vicksburg Sentinel* charged that the "whole affair has been 'cut and dried' at Jackson for weeks," while another paper implicated Governor Quitman in having conspired

²³ *The Organizer*, April 27, 1850. Other examples include the long letter from "Clarke County Democrat," related to a county race for the state legislature, in *The Eastern Clarion*, September 14, 1859; or Democratic editor Owen Van Vactor describing the legislature controlled by his own party: "The law-making of the country, not only in Mississippi but throughout the Union, is usually entrusted to incompetent office-hunters and small-potato demagogues whose chief business at the capitol is to get their per diem and drink mean whiskey." This outburst was in response to a new state law that fixed the rates printers were allowed to charge. *The Commonwealth*, April 11, 1855.

to favor Bell.²⁴ North Mississippi eventually backed Col. John Wilcox; the *Sentinel* endorsed [Robert?] Haynes; and many in the south and east favored Captain R. T. Daniel. One of Daniel's supporters in the east articulated the resentment felt by voters in that region toward all party leaders. "They have been regarded by the people of other sections of the State, as inferior to them in intelligence, and in every thing [sic] else. But they have not complained," he continued, and instead "supported whig and democratic nominees with the utmost willingness."²⁵ Choosing a party favorite for the U. S. Senate likewise proved disruptive. In 1850 Democrats from the north believed it was their "turn" to receive one of the posts, although they were once again disappointed. "It should not be presumed that because the North Mississippi Democracy do not attempt to disorganize the party," wrote editor Dill, "that therefore they are content and satisfied with any injustice practiced on them."²⁶ Evidently many Democrats continued to question the fairness and utility of conventions and rigid organization.

The Democrats' regional fissures showed again in the repeated attempts by some partisans to change the method of representation in the state convention. Those in the north, in particular, tried several times to apportion strength in the convention based on the number of Democratic votes cast in the previous state election. This proposed change

²⁴ *Vicksburg Sentinel* quoted in the *Monroe Democrat*, May 29, 1850; *Houston Patriot*, May 22, 1850.

²⁵ "Publius" in *The Mississippian*, May 17, 1850.

²⁶ *The Organizer*, January 5, 1850. See also the letter from "A Plain Democrat" in the same issue, and the editorial and letter from the *Houston Patriot*, reprinted in *The Organizer*, November, 1849.

would have undermined the ability of the Jackson clique and others in the older, southwest portion of the state--generally the most Whiggish--to control nominations. Even the suggestion of such an arrangement amounted to a slap in the face to those party managers in Jackson who routinely failed to carry their own county, despite the state organ and patronage available in the capital.²⁷

In private correspondence as well as public did Democrats articulate the factionalism which belied surface unity. A. G. Brown, for instance, worried in 1857 that his own party's gubernatorial candidate might campaign around the state and "say things against" him. Brown later advised a follower: "I think the true policy for my friends is to concede the Governor to the North and take any man they may propose unless they offer us an enemy."²⁸ Another partisan remarked that "[Governor John J.] McRae is A. G.

²⁷ See for example, editorials in the *Southern Standard*, February 12 and 26, 1853, the latter endorsed by the *Monroe Democrat* and *Houston Argus*, and those in *The Organizer*, November 12, 1849; and the proceedings of the 1857 state convention, where delegates from Tippah and Marshall counties (both in the north) offered resolutions to the same effect. Convention proceedings in *The Mississippian and State Gazette*, July 1, 1857.

²⁸ A. G. Brown to J. F. H. Claiborne, April 5, 1857, and May 13, 1857. Both in Claiborne Collection, box 1, folder 7 (emphasis added). Another instance of the party's regional problems was the bickering that followed the (Democratic) legislature's redistricting after the census of 1850. An excellent example is Otho R. Singleton to J. F. H. Claiborne, July 19, 1854, Claiborne Collection, box 6, folder 38. "I periled my life, last Summer, in the canvass with [Alexander K.] McClung & gained what I thought a glorious victory for the cause in my district; and now that 14000 majority of Democratic votes have been taken off and given to others. I do not think I am required to make such sacrifices of self and prospects, as may be demanded in the next contest . . . I do not know that I shall be a candidate again."

Brown's man & that fact is almost [enough to get elected] in this District as you know."²⁹ In the middle and late 1850s, in fact, the party's two great leaders, Jefferson Davis and A. G. Brown waged an ongoing battle for party control, aided by their assorted friends and political clients.³⁰

While the Democrats professed to embrace conventions and strict adherence to organization, the Whigs consistently appealed to antiparty sentiment among the voters. Hostility to caucuses and conventions remained central to their rhetoric throughout the party's existence in Mississippi. Whigs lampooned their opponents' supposed partisan zeal as compared to their own "statesmanlike" attitudes. "The natural inability of the Whig party to make itself a unit at all sacrifice of principle for the mere sake of naked triumph," insisted one editor, "is one of the plainest marks which distinguish it from the present opposition." He continued, praising his own party's "remarkable and honorable characteristics" of disorganization, unlike the Democrats who pursue the "cohesive power of public plunder" at whatever cost.³¹ It was more than mere rhetoric, though. The Whigs

²⁹ Hiram S. Van Eaton to William Nicholas Whitehurst, August 18, 1858, Whitehurst Papers, box 1, folder 7.

³⁰ See, for example, James Byrne Ranck, *Albert Gallatin Brown: Radical Southern Nationalist* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., Inc., 1937); and especially the correspondence between A. G. Brown and one of his leading men, J. F. H. Claiborne, in Claiborne Collection, MDAH, box 1. The Jefferson Davis papers also reveal the hostility between he and Brown.

³¹ *Vicksburg Weekly Whig*, May 22, 1850; also *Vicksburg Daily Whig*, July 2, 1849: "The name of democracy and the prejudice of party associations, never lose their spell upon his unsophisticated affections." See also *The Yazoo Weekly Whig*, April 1, 1853; *Vicksburg Daily Whig*, July 29, 1847.

actually were more disorganized than their opponents. Typical was the 1849 Congressional campaign, in which party leaders received contradictory reports of whether or not Reverend William Winans had accepted its nomination in district four. His hometown paper reported in the negative, although others insisted he was a candidate; the latter being confirmed about one month before the election. In addition, the Whigs sometimes failed to achieve statewide unity behind their nominees. For example, in 1853 the party chose Joseph McDowell of Rankin for state treasurer. Yazoo's partisans, however, "suggested" Daniel McLaurin of Covington in their ratification meeting, and the local paper printed his name as the county's "official nominee."³² As late as 1853 the party could muster delegates from less than one-half of all counties to attend a state convention.³³

In addition to their tangible lack of organization and failure to embrace conventions, the Whig press practiced, in general, a different and more conciliatory "style." Leaders of both parties acknowledged the widespread distrust of party organization and vituperative rhetoric, and tried to avoid public censure on that account. The Whigs,

³² *The Yazoo City Weekly Whig*, July 22, 1853. The same editor calmly reported that "Whigs in Madison [County] are going to support a mixed ticket, not recognizing the recommendations of the late so called Whig Convention, as binding upon them." With party unity like that, no wonder the Whigs had trouble. During the 1852 presidential campaign, editor George W. Harper of the *Hinds County Gazette*--one of the party's two state organs--admitted "that the nomination of Gen. Scott for the Presidency gave great dissatisfaction to the Whigs of this county." In other words, one of the party's two leading editors, representing the state's banner Whig county, conceded that few of his fellow partisans cared very much if their candidate was elected.

³³ Conflicting reports on Winans came from the *Natchez Courier* and *Wilkinson Whig*; reported in the *Port Gibson Reveille*, July 20, 1853. Other examples of Whig propaganda exploiting popular antipathy towards conventions and caucuses include *The American Citizen*, June 11, 1853. See also chapter two on the Whigs's ineptitude.

though, actually seemed more moderate. When William McWillie beat their candidate for third-district Representative in 1849, the *Vicksburg Whig* responded with typical magnanimity. "The Whigs did the rejoicing over the previous election in this District, and, we suppose, 'time about is fair play'." This same newspaper often printed the Democratic state ticket as well as their own.³⁴ Another party editor commented that "I have not long time met a more pleasant gentleman than [Democratic] Governor [John J.] McRae, though my paper was sometimes hard on him during the last and preceding political canvasses." One Whig wrote his local paper, commending the Democratic legislature on its performance: "I believe everyone admits that there never has been a more attentive and hard-working set of members assembled in the Capitol than the members of the present session." Still another complimented the same representatives for their attention to detail and the "little time spent in mischievous and stupid debates," as some previous sessions had done. Finally, one opposition editor reviewed the recent legislative session and declared "the Senators and members with a very few honorable exceptions, who appeared to be actuated by a truly patriotic desire for the good of the State, were members of the Democratic party."³⁵ In short, Whig editors and partisans, apparently less committed or

³⁴ *Vicksburg Daily Whig*, Nov. 17, 1849; *Hinds County Gazette*, Sept. 14, 1849. See also "Political Moderation," June 14, 1849 in the *Tri-Weekly Whig*, and compliments toward the Democratic Gubernatorial nominee in 1857, reprinted in *The Mississippian and State Gazette*, July 1, 1857.

³⁵ *Yazoo City Weekly Whig*, March 23, 1853; *Hinds County Gazette*, Feb. 11, 1856; *The Weekly American Banner*, March 21, 1856.

truculent than the Democrats, failed to match their opponents' customarily vitriolic outbursts.

The Democrats recognized the need to counter Whig benevolence, as well as insinuations about their fondness for caucuses and conventions. They usually did so by accusing their opponents of the same addiction. The Jackson correspondent for the *Port Gibson Reveille* reported the Whig state convention in typically sarcastic fashion. "[T]he delegates are holding darling little Caucuses all about town for the purpose, I opine, of presenting their ... no-caucus candidates." He concluded with another warning: "The ticket which the Convention will probably present, may decline; but be assured, the ticket which opposes ours in the end, will have its conception and birth to-night and to-morrow--and it will be the offspring of a CAUCUS!"³⁶ The *Mississippian* made similar charges: "Nothing can be more hypocritical than the cant of the whigs about caucus candidates, king caucus, and cliques, or the clique. They pretend to oppose nominees of democratic conventions," the editor complained, "because they are nominees when it is well known that all over the Union wherever they have the strength to succeed, they are united in the support of regular convention nominees." Even in Mississippi, he finished, in "almost

³⁶ July 20, 1853 (emphasis original). The charge that the initial Whig ticket would resign proved inaccurate. There is no evidence that the customary Whig difficulty in finding candidates to accept nominations or enter the state canvass was engineered for public consumption.

every county where they have a majority, a caucus or a convention have brought out their candidates."³⁷

Over and over again, Democrats hammered Whigs as the party of "secret caucuses"--something "even worse" than conventions because the former took place behind closed doors. Whig caucuses, claimed one editor, "are held in the back rooms of stores and offices, . . . in them party leaders rule with absolute sway . . . and when they have compassed their ends in secret, they proceed to reward the 'lucky fellows' openly." Another Democrat charged that "the Whigs never hold any public meetings in this county. About five or six Whigs hereabouts, attend to all such matters, as appointing delegates for the party and nominating candidates for county offices." Hiram Van Eaton lampooned the Whigs in 1853 when they finally produced a slate of "independent" candidates: "yet look again and there it is, just as pretty; plump and saucy looking a caucus bantling, as can be seen anywhere or manufactured by any clique or secret conclave under the sun."³⁸ The

³⁷ October 22, 1847 (emphasis original). At least some of the Whig outrage was, of course, hypocritical. As early as 1843 one Whig editor suggested making county and municipal nominations in Vicksburg because the party had such a majority there. *Vicksburg Daily Whig*, November 10, 1843. Other examples of Democrats invoking the "caucus issue" against Whigs include the *Port Gibson Reveille*, April 13, October 26, and November 2, 1853; the several exchanges from "Senex" and "Q in the Corner," in *The Organizer*, April and May, 1850: "The first convention I ever saw in the town of Oxford, was a convention of whigs, assembled for the purpose of nominating their candidates. And yet [the Whigs] ... believe that the people are so dull and stupid, that [t]he[y] can induce them to believe that the convention system is dangerous and sinful, that the deliberations of the last democratic convention resulted in disgrace to the county, and that the pure and immaculate whigs have never been guilty of such sinning in all their lives, either by holding County or State conventions" (May 11).

³⁸ *Columbus Democrat*, Aug. 4, 1849; *Democratic Flag*, March 31, 1852; *Brandon Republican*, July 19, 1853. Others include the *Woodville Republican*, July 12, 19, and 26,

managers and activists of both parties, then, worked under the assumption that many voters distrusted and disliked the convention system. Whig criticism and public attitudes forced the Democrats, in particular, constantly to defend their organization. They strove to convince the public, still skeptical in the 1850s, that parties offered a proper way to manage political conflict. Democratic strategy was to argue that their admitted conventions were in fact more "democratic" than supposed Whig caucuses, while Whigs condemned both conventions and caucuses and declared no connection with either. In other words, spokesmen for both parties tried to convince voters that their party organization offered the least "proscriptive structure" and greatest openness to general public input: antiparty parties.

The Democrats worked hard to answer Whig accusations about conventions and caucuses, and had to work even harder against the successor American (or "Know-Nothing") party. The nativist Know Nothings encountered a host of problems in Mississippi and the South in general, most importantly their ties to northern reform and antislavery activism.³⁹ But the party also had a potentially strong appeal in antipartyism.

1851, Oct. 15, 1852.

³⁹ See Cecil S. Hilliard Ross, "Dying Hard, Dying Fast: The Know-Nothing Experience in Mississippi," Ph.D. Dissertation, Notre Dame, 1982; and W. Darrell Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1950). On Democrats accusing Know Nothings of "spoils-hungry office-seeking," see the *Fayette Watch-Tower*, Oct. 9 and 16, 1857; *Lauderdale Republican*, Aug. 7 and Oct. 30, 1855; *Oxford Signal*, Sept. 14, 1856; *Empire Democrat*, March 3, 1855; and *The Commonwealth*, March 1 and Sept. 1, 1855: Know-Nothing candidates are products "of the most thorough caucus system ever known in America--the nominee of a secret, oath-bound order--the creature of wire-workers and office-hunters." See also the debate over which party had a better claim to be the "antiparty party," in *The Weekly*

Like their predecessors, the Know Nothings accused the Democrats of being rotten to the core with caucuses, wire-pulling, and hack politicians. Throughout the state, Know Nothings invoked the politics of antipartyism. "I do assure you most solemnly," wrote one early propagandist, "that there are among its members men of all former parties, and that by thousands upon thousands, . . . and among them not only prominent politicians." Another pledged that "to the demagogue and party hack, he [the Know Nothing] is as terrible as an 'army with banners'." Know Nothings, the same author vowed, "expose selfishness and partisan bigotry in all their deformity." Some candidates even implied that the Know Nothings were not actually a "real" party. "Mr. Samuel Matthews, the American candidate for the Legislature was called to the stand," reported one editor, and said he was a Democrat, "and was proud that his democracy did not prevent his espousal of the great American doctrines."⁴⁰

In fact, much Know-Nothing rhetoric targeted public opposition to demagoguery and spoilsmen. "We do not weep to see the good people of the country repudiating the maxim that 'to the victors belong the spoils'," preached one partisan. Rather, "we are glad to see they begin to be indignant that offices . . . should be conferred as the reward of

American Banner, June 29, 1855.

⁴⁰ "Plain Truth," and "The Portrait of Sam," both in the *Hinds County Gazette*, November 8, 1854 and May 23, 1855, respectively; *The Southern Mercury*, Sept. 11, 1855. Other examples include the *Weekly Conservative* (Aberdeen), June 23, 1855, and *Yazoo City Weekly Whig*, November 10, 1856: "We say the, let political demagogues harangue to their hearts content, and apply all the abusive epithets they can think of to the Know Nothings--it will do no harm." Also, *The Fort Adams Item*, April 14 and June 2, 1855.

electioneering services, without regard to the qualifications of the appointee." Another editor ridiculed the "hollow" partisanship of the old parties. "One knows he is a Whig, the other that he is a Democrat; when that is said it is impossible for him to say *why* he is either."⁴¹ The Know Nothings, in other words, would rescue honest patriots from their disgust at the degenerate party leaders who worked only for selfish rewards.⁴²

At least one Democrat found their strategy difficult to confront. Wiley P. Harris noted with evident concern:

The common class of men in the country away from cities or towns always speak of parties as existing independent of themselves. The Know Nothings assume this to be true, and enlist them in a crusade against parties. [A] part of the people, determined in spite of parties, to rectify abuses, and they are lead [sic] naturally and easily to refer to their own feelings, as the credence that, it is a spontaneous movement of the people, in opposition to parties. The attacks of our speakers upon KN.ism are felt by each individual

⁴¹ *The Fort Adams Item*, June 9, 1855. Some historians of Know Nothingism in the North have emphasized the movement's appeal to voters fed up with "politics as usual." Among northern native Americans, in particular, the Know Nothings addressed a series of "ethnocultural" issues that the Whigs and Democrats had ignored. See esp. Michael F. Holt, "The Politics of Impatience: The Origins of Know Nothingism," *Journal of American History* 60 (1973), 309-331.

⁴² *Tri-Weekly Mercury*, June 23, 1855. "These evils [spoils-seeking partymen] have long existed and have led a most extensive influence in demoralizing the community, threatening the total extinction of public virtue and patriotism. We do not therefore sympathize with those who dread the Know Nothings, as likely to break up the party organizations which have so long fouled our country, absolutely, and most tyrannically." This author, then, indicted both Whigs and Democrats as corrupt parties--Know Nothings would rescue Mississippi from them both. Other examples include the *Yazoo City Weekly Whig*, Jan. 12 and Nov. 10, 1855, and Dec. 15, 1854; and *Hinds County Gazette*, May 23, 1855, April 29, 1857. The last editorial pledged that the American party convention would bring forth "no band of hungry and greedy aspirants. No scrambling for place--no superhuman efforts for access to the public treasury." Others include the *Weekly Conservative*, June 23, 1855.

member of the order as aimed at him & he easily achieves the connection that the attack is prompted by party spirit, or self interest.⁴³

To this partisan, at least, the Democratic party remained vulnerable to antiparty sentiment among many voters. Also, the writer betrayed an awareness that "abuses" needed rectification, and that many Mississippians merely needed to tap their "own feelings" to activate a natural "opposition to parties" and effect such reform. Finally, Harris admitted that when Democrats tried to respond to Know-Nothing criticism, people often complained that it was simply partisanship, and not an honest defense of the political system. Furthermore, he hinted that some Mississippians equated "party spirit" with "self interest." The ability of Know Nothings to stir antiparty feelings within the electorate, then, had an unsettling effect on the Democratic majority. The party's state organ, in fact, decided finally that it was better to join than fight them: "We are pleased to see that this spirit [antipartyism], to a great extent, is animating the masses of the people. They are sick and worn out with this senseless and insane cry of party, party, and nothing but party."⁴⁴

Their own antiparty rhetoric eventually helped trap the Know Nothings. The secrecy that initially fascinated many men, particularly the young and politically immature, soon became a liability. Working within a political culture that so evidently still distrusted

⁴³ Wiley P. Harris to J. F. H. Claiborne, October 8, 1855, Claiborne Collection, MDAH, box 2, folder 3.

⁴⁴ *The Mississippian and State Gazette*, July 1, 1857. As against the Whigs, Democrats also invoked the politics of antipartyism against the nativists. "If we win," wrote one Democrat, our "country will be saved from the grasping ambition of a secret and artful party." Reported in the *Hinds County Gazette*, August 1, 1855; see also the *Oxford Signal*, September 14, 1856.

caucuses, conventions, or any meeting which smelled the least bit clandestine, the nativists had to come out in the open. Once recognized and identified as another "typical" political party, the antiparty message lost much of its force. Again, though, the party's difficulty in maintaining secrecy and the public relations problems it created, provided additional evidence of public dissatisfaction with party managers and cliques of office-seekers.⁴⁵

The antiparty message of the Know Nothings, as with the Whigs and Democrats, included the frequent accusation that parties robbed men of independent thought and instead substituted blind loyalty to party doctrine.⁴⁶ This traditional complaint was hardly limited to the South, of course. Mississippians shared the republican ideals of statesmanship and independence that historians have emphasized throughout antebellum America. "We are ever boasting of our independent spirit," wrote one Mississippian, "yet it is an undeniable fact that a majority of our citizens are laboring under the most galling political bondage." Another complained that "a majority of voters never look beyond the paragraphs of campaign journals or the crude effusions of party orators. Deriving their whole knowledge from this source, it must necessarily partake of the passion, prejudice, and error common to it." Expressions of dissatisfaction such as these were widespread in

⁴⁵ Ross, "Dying Hard, Dying Fast," *passim*, and Rawson, "Party Politics in Mississippi," 139-233.

⁴⁶ The Know-Nothing crusade against Catholicism, of course, also revolved around such a complaint: Catholics owed total allegiance to the Pope and thus could not be faithful to American democracy. See Ronald P. Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827-1861* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1971).

antebellum America, reaffirming the power of republican values that emphasized the virtue of independent thought and self-sacrificing public service.⁴⁷

Furthermore, in the context of southern honor, obedience to party smacked of dependence or "unmanliness." One writer echoed numerous editorials when he ridiculed the "honor" of serving as an "instructed or *commanded*" party delegate. "But when party sends forth its edict the promptings of self-respect must be crushed out," he claimed, "[w]e do not envy the *honor* conferred upon [instructed] delegates." Editors commonly included the language of masculinity in their antiparty bombast. "Clandestine cliques" were fundamentally unrepublican, argued Know-Nothing Levi S. Robertson. Parties (excepting his own, of course) attracted only those spoils-seekers who are nothing but "fawning

⁴⁷ "Party Spirit," in *OCM*, January 1858, Oakland College Papers, box 6, folder 109. This writer goes on to describe the annual "exhibitions" of elections as "among the greatest evils" in the country. "The Demagogue," in *OCM*. Expressions of disgust with politics and parties were widespread in private correspondence. Ferdinand L. Claiborne admitted he was "done with elections--the judicial canvass so disgusted me, that I have determined to keep aloof from all interference hereafter." F. L. Claiborne to William Nicholas Whitehurst, n.d., Whitehurst Papers, box 1, folder 5. Many of Quitman's correspondents professed a distaste for parties, no doubt parroting the opinions of their master. See in particular box 5, folder 2 of the Claiborne Papers. Jefferson Davis' experienced periodic bouts of antipartyism, including his famous lament: "A truce to politics the meanest and most demoralizing pursuit which is followed." Jefferson Davis to Stephen Cocke, August 2, 1849, in Crist, Dix, and Beringer, eds., *The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Volume 4*, 25. The post-bellum memoirs of Reuben Davis and Henry Foote are bitter in their denunciation of partisan spirit, but that reflects partly the contemporary thinking about the Civil War. *Recollections of Mississippi and Mississippians* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, The Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1890); *Casket of Reminiscences* (Washington, D. C.: Chronicle Publishing Co., 1874), respectively. For the South in particular, see Kenneth Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen*. On republicanism, see Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967); Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1969); and note 8, in the Introduction.

sycophants who bow and submit to the[ir] unmanly and pernicious influence." Some writers likewise rebuked partisan editors, they were not fit for a "man's position," claimed one independent editor. "Of all things in the world we do most despise a cringing parasite, clinging around the feet of his party god-heads without the spirit to cry [anything] else than hurrah!"⁴⁸ A party hack, in short, was not independent and hardly a man at all.

While some observers reproached the voters for following the dictates of party editors, the press itself frequently criticized its own conduct. One independent newspaper included the trenchant grievance: "if editors were more independent and manly, and less servile, shifting and jesuitical, it is believed that they would exercise a wider and more genial influence."⁴⁹ Other editors objected to their colleagues' extremism in defense of party. "There is a species of Partizan zeal often exhibited in our country by the Editors of the Press," complained one Democrat, "as lamentable as it is baneful and corrupt. The spirit which prompts an Editor never to admit that there is aught of patriotism in the acts of a political opponent, bespeaks either of gross bigotry and ignorance, or an utter want of moral sensibility." These and similar editorials, of course, aimed at public opinion and failed utterly to moderate the vitriolic language often used against one's opponents. But

⁴⁸ *The Prairie News*, May 26, 1859; *The Fort Adams Item*, Jan. 20, 1855; *The Prairie News*, Sept. 16, 1858. Others include the *Hinds County Gazette*, April 27, 1853, which lampoons the "pusillanimous cry" of the "drivelling" and "grovelling" demagogue; or *The American Citizen*, June 11, 1853.

⁴⁹ *Southern Standard*, March 27, 1852. These editors professed their continued nonpartisanship on the second anniversary of publication: "[T]he Standard owes its existence neither to party, classes nor cliques. The harness of party never galls our withers--never--it never shall." January 22, 1853.

such habitual calls for restraint indicated, once again, that partisans recognized the popular mood of antipartyism.⁵⁰

Another measure of the voters' suspicion of politicians and parties was the widely sanctioned "Right of Instruction." This republican tradition gave constituents absolute power over their representatives, supposedly denying a politician's freedom to act according to his own conscience. In other words, voters did not want "independent statesmen," but rather closely monitored "agents" of the popular will. Their concern reflected the widespread mood of antipartyism: one simply could not trust party politicians whom one did not know personally. Instead of trusting their representatives, voters tried to keep them on a short leash.⁵¹ Elected officials were "merely agents," wrote one

⁵⁰ *Port Gibson Reville*, May 3, 1853. Other examples include the *Vicksburg Weekly Whig*, October 22, 1851: "It is much regretted ... that partisan presses should be encouraged in the indulgence of the most wanton and violent vituperation and personal abuse of the candidates;" and *Southern Standard*, August 28, 1852.

⁵¹ On the origins of the "Right of Instruction" see Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 189-191; 369-372. The right, Wood argues, reflected in part the Revolutionary regard for community consensus, but also the strong current of antipartyism running through all republican thought. "The legislature are [merely] the trustees of the people and accountable to them," wrote Revolutionary William Paca of Maryland, and all the leading Whig intellectuals, including Locke, Trenchard, Hampden, and Sidney, upheld a "trusteeship relation between constituents and representatives" (371). Wood also notes that most Federalists opposed the right of instruction as too much democracy. Another picture of southern representational theory, also emphasizing antipartyism but with a different emphasis is Kenneth Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen: The Political Culture of American Slavery* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985). Greenberg maintains that southerners--in his case South Carolinians--distrusted parties and feared professional politicians, and therefore wanted "independent statesmen" who would follow the dictates of their own conscience and not the "shackles" of party ideology. At heart, Mississippians may have wanted statesmen, but they realistically decided that was not possible. Instead, it was better to force one's partisan representatives to toe the line, since parties and

Mississippian, and "these agents are becoming extremely delinquent in the discharge of their respective duties--particularly careful of their own interests and negligent of those of their principals [the sovereign voters]." The people, in short, needed to keep a close eye on devious politicians who should pay more attention to what the voters wanted. "Congress," he concluded, "should only be considered a National Convention of Delegates, to canvass and record the will of the people, the real law of the land."⁵²

Jefferson Davis regularly made a tour through much of the state after each session, speaking to voters and "giving an account of my recent stewardship." In Raymond, Mississippi, after the heated session that included the Compromise of 1850, Davis suggested that he opposed the measures. But he would not say he favored resistance by force at the moment, but would follow the "dictates of the people implicitly," whatever they decided. It was a thin line for men of honor who needed to assert their independence in order to gain the respect of voters, yet could not seem too powerful or alienated those same constituents.⁵³ Many of these denials, of course, were simply ritualized expressions, demonstrating to voters that he was "one of them" and not too far removed from their concerns. Even in private, though, Davis acknowledged the power of instructions. Reviewing his response to the Compromise he told a friend that "I opposed them because

politicians could never be trusted.

⁵² *Jefferson Journal*, June 25, 1858.

⁵³ Crist, Dix, and Beringer, eds., *The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Volume 4: 1849-1852* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 135. On the delicate job of assuming a certain "passivity" towards public power, see esp. Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen*, 3-41.

I thought them wrong and of a dangerous tendency, and also because of the people in every form, and the Legislature by resolutions of instruction required me to oppose them."⁵⁴

The furor over the Compromise of 1850, in fact, elicited a lengthy discussion of the Right of Instruction. Many State-Rights Democrats felt betrayed by Senator Henry Foote, who had supported and helped steer the Compromise measures through the Senate. Opponents claimed Foote violated the "expressed will of the people" in supporting the Compromise since state legislators had approved resolutions "instructing" the state's national delegation to oppose it (Foote was the only Mississippi Senator or Representative to support the measures). "He is charged . . . with knowingly and willfully misrepresenting the sentiments of the people of his State as made known to him," said Lucius Q. C. Lamar. Other Democrats, in particular, echoed Lamar's complaints. "He who is elected by the people to fill any governmental office under our system, is merely their agent." Democrats, in fact, claimed the Right of Instruction was a partisan issue: they supported this ultimate expression of popular will; Whigs upheld the "Federal doctrine that the representative should not be controlled by the will of the people."⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Crist, Dix, and Beringer, eds., *Papers of Jefferson Davis, Volume 4*, 300. Also in Volume 4, see 191-193; 205-206. See also James T. McIntosh, Lynda L. Crist, and Mary S. Dix, eds., *The Papers of Jefferson Davis, Volume 3: July 1846-December 1848* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 3-5.

⁵⁵ Edward Mayes, *Lucius Q. C. Lamar: His Life, Times, and Speeches. 1825-1893* (Nashville, TN: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1896), 52; *Southern Standard*, July 24, 1852; *The Mississippian*, June 6, 1851. Other discussions of the Right of Instruction include *The Herald and Correspondent*, June 23, 1852; *The Constitution*, April 19, 1851 (on Foote); James Lusk Alcorn to Amelia, Nov. 26, 1850,

Democrats who made that claim, however, were wrong; Whigs and Unionists likewise defended the Right of Instruction. Unionists in Lawrence County condemned their state senator and representative for supporting the secession convention in 1851, against the expressed "will of the people," made clear (they claimed) in local meetings. Unionist editors Thomas Palmer and Edward Pickett declined to support anyone for governor in 1851 until the county conventions made recommendations. They urged that "delegates be instructed by their county delegations only," to avoid both media pressure and the chance of party cliques controlling the process against the "people's choices." One Whig from Bolivar County likewise complained that elected officials enjoyed too much freedom. He suggested a complicated series of committees, organized in "each county, or beat in each county," that would consolidate reports of public opinion and "instruct" representatives in Jackson and Washington how to vote on certain issues.⁵⁶

Perhaps most revealing is that no one ever considered the Right of Instruction with regards to county officers, members of the Board of Police, or local magistrates and constables. One could usually trust those men--friends, neighbors, and kinsmen--or if not, one knew where to find them. But a party politician was someone that one did not know

Alcorn Family Papers, MDAH, folder 2. Alcorn, a Whig, defended Foote's course in support of the Compromise.

⁵⁶ *Flag of the Union*, Feb. 7 and 14, 1851; *Vicksburg Weekly Whig*, Sept. 11, 1850. Others include the Unionist censure of their county delegation from Itawamba County, reported in the *Columbus Democrat*, Jan. 4, 1851; and the circular signed by Unionists and Whigs in the state legislature, opposing the call of a secession convention, which asked the people if they would "permit your *servants* to arrogate to themselves the authority of *masters*, and to dictate terms to you. See *The Herald and Correspondent*, June 7, 1850.

or trust, and he needed to be supervised as closely as possible. Thus, wide popular support for the Right of Instruction was another indication that most Mississippians still hated parties in the 1850s. Rather than objects of intense devotion, as many historians claim, parties and politicians were instead seen as agents of last resort: only when absolutely unavoidable would one grudgingly accept their lead in politics.

Still another measure of the popular disinclination toward parties was the admission that most people simply ignored local meetings and county conventions. Contemporaries regularly complained that turnout for these primary meetings was abysmal. Democratic stalwart Wiley P. Harris acknowledged that "the system of conventions or caucus system very often exposes the fact that the people are indifferent." In party meetings, then, most voters typically failed to show. "What is the consequence of indifference and inaction upon the part of the masses of every government and country?" asked another partisan. "It is the usurpation of power by designing demagogues and ambitious men." Contemporaries conceded, then, that antipartyism was both a cause and effect of general diffidence toward conventions and caucuses.⁵⁷

In both public and private, then, Mississippi's spokesmen expressed their concerns that office-hungry demagogues, conventions, and party organization offended the general public. Both parties appealed to antiparty sentiments, assailing their opponents as "mere

⁵⁷ Wiley P. Harris, "Autobiography of Wiley P. Harris," in Dunbar Rowland, ed., *Courts, Judges, and Lawyers of Mississippi 1798-1935* (Jackson, MS: Herman Brothers, 1935), 301; *The Democrat*, March 16, 1853. See also *The Wilkinson Advertiser*, March 17, 1858, and the accompanying debate over county conventions (also discussed in Chapter 5).

spoilsmen," and accusing each other of subverting the democratic process through secretive caucuses and conventions. While the minority parties made such bombast central to their message, the Democrats used similar language. The Whigs's lack of organization and enthusiasm, and plain ineptitude, was matched by their opponent's regionalism and factionalism--making a state political order characterized not by rigid party organization and continuity, but rather uncertainty and sometimes shifting allegiance. As the war approached, the general public had not accepted party organization, and the activists themselves remained dubious.⁵⁸

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Despite this atmosphere of antipartyism, did organizations and activists matter? Parties were important, particularly at the state level. Caucuses and conventions had their defenders, ambitious men succeeded in politics, and partisanship did mean something to many antebellum Mississippians. The relationship between political activity and partisanship, in fact, existed in an orderly continuum from national and state elections down to precinct contests for justice of the peace and constable. Parties organized voters when personal friendships, kin networks, and professional acquaintances simply could not. This need, of course, proved greatest in national and state elections, but existed in district

⁵⁸ This interpretation contrasts with the dominant view that parties were the essence of all political conflict. Joel Silbey summarized: By "the late 1830s, both Whigs and Democrats had extensive partisan organizational structures and ways of doing business in every Southern state except South Carolina, all linked directly to their national parties. The electorate in every state . . . responded to and were guided by these organizations as they were elsewhere." *The American Political Nation, 1838-1893* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 41.

racess as well. Contests for circuit court judges and seats in Congress indicated the combined influence of party and personal associations. County and local elections betrayed almost no reliance on parties.

As the best means to ensure victory at the national or state level, some Democrats actively defended the caucus and convention system. "The Democratic party, always in the majority in the country, owes it continued success and ascendancy in the National Councils," resolved one party meeting, "to the organization by means of the Convention and Caucus." This system, they argued, reserved to the majority within the party the right to name its popular candidates. It further asserted that only those "responsible" enough and accountable to the public would receive the party endorsement. Caucuses and conventions ensured that this would happen.⁵⁹ Significantly, these resolutions spoke only to national elections. Another Democratic editor urged his readers to support the state convention: "We like the Convention system, and shall continue to advocate it until its uses are eclipsed by its abuses."⁶⁰ Even partisans who defended conventions quickly agreed that the system was "liable to abuse," and could be "subversive of democratic principles." Yet, they typically argued, it was for now the best means to organize parties.⁶¹

⁵⁹ *Port Gibson Reveille*, August 3, 1853.

⁶⁰ *The Constitution*, April 26, 1851. This sort of tepid enthusiasm characterized most editors' support for conventions. "[W]e, a portion of the democracy of Lowndes co. are willing to abide the [convention] system until a better one is devised," resolved one local meeting. See the *Columbus Democrat*, July 14, 1849, also April 21, 1848; or *The Commonwealth*, April 7, 1855.

⁶¹ *The Yazoo Democrat*, July 20, 1853; *Eastern Clarion*, Aug. 3, 1859. Most convention supporters were Democratic editors, but even a few Whigs tried to encourage

Some activists also defended parties as the best means to eliminate corruption at the national level. "Our national experience has made the fact conspicuous that party organization and party discipline have been the shield of political virtue and the sword of political wisdom," wrote one editor. "In this country no party times are to dreade [sic]! The death of party breeds corruption. In every such event politics become a personality, and legislation a strife of self-interests."⁶² Parties thus provided a mechanism through which the selfish could be defeated--either their ambitions would be blocked in convention, or thwarted when trying to pass legislation that fellow party members recognized as purely self-interested.

A majority of the public probably accepted parties at the national and state levels as the most efficient way to understand politics and recognize candidates. The inability to know candidates personally made parties essential, even though their methods of organization and the effects of "blind" loyalties concerned many Mississippians. In other words, a majority of voters probably acknowledged that parties provided a necessary reference point to understand national and state politics, while still voicing their apprehension, and tried to moderate the ill effects of party organization. The party press, focused on national and state candidates and issues, emphasized organization and often gave the mistaken impression that parties were the *sine qua non* of all politics.

organization: "If you have not thorough county organizations, you cannot expect to give your candidates for State offices the entire vote of the party." *Flag of the Union*, Feb. 11, 1853.

⁶² *The Yazoo Democrat*, May 25, 1853.

Politicians committed to their parties were, of course, also evident. Senator A. G. Brown recommended one local candidate as a "true party" man if not particularly "able." He also admitted that "I would as soon think of abandoning my father when set upon by robbers" than quit the Democrats and join the Know-Nothings. Governor John J. McRae, more nakedly ambitious than most, continually jockeyed for nominations. He admitted to a friend in 1853 that he was financially strapped and hoped to get elected to "advance my interests in that way."⁶³ The Whigs also had loyal members. One party man admitted that although he did not understand the proposed repudiation of bank bonds, "I was a Whig and thought that any measure supported by the Democrats generally, must be wrong!"⁶⁴

Both organizations had committed partisans, and both contained men who were often candidly ambitious. But as the previous evidence indicated, editors and spokesmen from both parties believed that typical Mississippians did not like or trust parties, conventions, or "professional" politicians. They reluctantly accepted parties as guides to voting behavior in national and state elections, but otherwise ignored them whenever possible. Voting data from the late 1840s and 1850s, the focus of chapter four, likewise demonstrated the existence of a continuum of party influence from the national level down to the precincts. There was a limited partisan culture in antebellum Mississippi, although confined in influence to national and state elections. Finally, the enthusiastic supporters

⁶³ A. G. Brown to J. F. H. Claiborne, September 27, 1858 and April 27, 1855. John J. McRae to J. F. H. Claiborne, February 23, 1853. All in Claiborne Collection, MDAH respectively, box 1, folder 7, box 1, folder 4, and box 5, folder 5.

⁶⁴ Horace S. Fulkerson, *Random Recollections of Early Days in Mississippi* (Vicksburg, MI: Vicksburg Printing and Publishing Co., 1885), 94.

of parties remained mostly editors (especially Democratic ones), committeemen, and a few candidates themselves.

CHAPTER 4

THE PARTISAN CONTINUUM: PATTERNS OF STATE AND LOCAL VOTING

The speeches and party rhetoric of antebellum Mississippians revealed a widespread mood of hostility toward party organization and professional politicians. Most people, of course, left no written account of their feelings and voting returns represent the only extensive record of mass political behavior. While incomplete and imperfect, this evidence allows insight into political attitudes of the inarticulate. Furthermore, because rates of turnout remained consistently high among antebellum Mississippians, election data provide a more complete record of their behavior than for voters elsewhere. The contours of voting behavior throughout this period support the continuum of partisanship offered in chapter three. Although loyalties were far from stable over the decade, parties gave an organizational energy to national and state elections--as reflected in the constant and impassioned rhetoric of editors and activists. In other words, men seem to have thought about state and national elections in partisan terms, since they had little choice. Unable to know candidates personally, men resigned themselves to trusting the rhetoric and symbolism of party activists. At the county and local level nonpartisanship was the rule; personal influence, family connections, and above all residence remained the defining characteristics of this community-oriented network of voters. District races revealed a combination of these two forces, mixing party inclinations with personal prejudice.

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Elections for president, governor, and state officers brought Mississippians to the polls in great numbers. There were ten such contests between 1848 and 1860, and voter participation exceeded eighty percent in seven of those ten (Table 4-1). Only late in the decade, when the Democratic majority approached two-thirds, did participation drop below 65.0 percent. The only other exception was the presidential election of 1852. In the North, historians often cite Whig dissatisfaction with Winfield Scott and his ill-advised overtures toward immigrant voters for a concomitant diffidence.¹ In Mississippi the decline apparently happened for two different reasons. First, some Union party supporters (many of whom had traditionally been Whigs) became dissatisfied with the choice of Scott, perceived to be under the "spell" of free soiler William Seward. Unionists preferred President Fillmore, who had signed the Compromise of 1850. Second, many more State-Rights men, who had supported Quitman and then Davis in 1851, evidently stayed home rather than endorse either major candidate, both of whom sanctioned the Compromise measures (Table 4-2).²

¹ See Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: Wiley, 1978); Ronald P. Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827-1861* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971); and William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

² These data are the results of "ecological regression," a statistical technique that estimates the relationship between individual voters' choices over time. Its most important contribution is the inclusion of nonvoters into the formula, estimating the degree of mobility into and out of the active voting population. This method of statistical analysis remains controversial. The figures presented here should be treated as rough estimates only, showing relationships and general trends, and should not be considered as precise values. One reads the tables either down or across. Table 4-2.a, for example, estimates

The data presented in tables two through nine help sketch the outline of partisan coalitions over the decade of the 1850s. While the numbers are simply estimates and do not indicate precise figures, they do suggest certain trends. Most importantly, from these data it appears that the voting population remained quite fluid. First, men changed their partisan allegiance from year to year. In other words, state and national issues could matter and voters responded, for a variety of reasons, to party propaganda. Second, a substantial number of voters entered or left the voting population from one election to the next. Despite consistently high turnout, then, one should consider nonvoters as a central factor in successive contests. This uncertainty was due to both switching voters and natural demographic change resulting from mobility, death, and coming of age, and to those who just stayed home.

The Democrats and their opponents did "steal" voters from each other. As the crisis of 1849-51 demonstrated, of course, a powerful issue such as sectionalism could break up existing patterns within a few months. The Know-Nothing movement captured some

what happened to the 1851 voters. Accordingly, 52.3% of Foote's supporters went for Winfield Scott; 35.7% to Franklin Pierce; and 11.9% stayed home, died, or moved away. In Table 4-2.b, the figures represent where the 1852 voters came from. Thus, all of Scott's Mississippi supporters came from the Union party of 1851. Pierce got his votes mostly from Jefferson Davis supporters, but also nearly 40% from Foote. Most nonvoters had been supporters of Jefferson Davis. This is logical since both Scott and Pierce pledged support for the Compromise of 1850, which the State-Rights Party had opposed, and therefore many preferred to sit out the election than endorse the hated Compromise. For more information on the method see Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, especially 475-481; J. Morgan Kousser, "Ecological Regression and the Analysis of Past Politics," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, IV 2 (Autumn, 1973): 237-262. For a critique, see William H. Flanigan and Nancy H. Zingale, "Alchemist's Gold: Inferring Individual Relationships from Aggregate Data," *Social Science History*, IX 1 (Winter, 1985): 73-91.

Democrats in 1855 (Table 4-3) and the threat of secession in 1860 likewise sent a few men to the Constitutional Unionists and John Bell (Table 4-8). Not surprisingly, Democrats appeared more consistent in their ability to recruit opposition voters, reflecting the steady accretion of strength they enjoyed during the 1850s. This Democratic shift became pronounced after the Know Nothings disintegrated as the last national party challenger (Tables 4-4, 4-5, and 4-6). The switching voters swapped loyalty in response to a number of issues: sectionalism, fear of secession, nativism, antipartyism, and a host of other idiosyncratic motives. The larger conclusion, though, is that partisanship was not fixed. Party organizers did get men to the polls at an amazing and consistent rate, but it remained uncertain for whom they might vote.

While voters did switch directly from one party to the opposition, the bulk of uncertainty in Mississippi's party elections came from nonvoters. Both parties relied on the large numbers of newcomers who participated in each election. In 1855, for example, about one in every four voters had not taken part in the previous presidential contest (Table 4-3). The Know-Nothing era, in fact, produced the highest levels of new voter mobilization. The nativists seemed to capture more nonvoters than their opponents, and overall about one in five Mississippi Know Nothings was previously inactive (Tables 4-3 and 4-4). After 1855, the Democrats lured more young men and new voters than the opposition, although about half of the Constitutional Unionists were also fresh converts. (Tables 4-6, 4-7, and 4-8).³ The overall impression given by these numbers, then,

³ The overall lower rates of turnout may have distorted the figures for those elections

indicates that in any given election each party's support included at least fifteen to twenty-five percent new voters or converts.

These data support observations made by contemporary Mississippians. William Sharkey, one of the opposition's foremost leaders throughout the antebellum years, advised Know-Nothing gubernatorial candidate Charles Fontaine to campaign actively in 1855. "There [are] many people with whom a man's presence would have an influence, and if one party canvasses and the other does not," Sharkey cautioned, "you and I both know that the canvassing party would gather up hundreds of voters who are not governed by any firmly fixed principles." One Democrat relayed similar sentiments to a fellow partisan during the 1852 canvass. "Still, we have broken the enthusiasm of the Whigs, and you know, that much depends upon enthusiasm. It carries along the floating vote."⁴ These party regulars' opinions indicated that they expected hundreds of votes to be up for grabs in each election. Another experienced Democrat remarked to a friend that "you have been long enough amongst the people of that region [the piney woods] to know that they have

--men who appear as nonvoters were more likely than at other times to have participated before, but skipped the previous election used in the equation. In other words, men listed as nonvoters late in the 1850s were less likely to be recent immigrants to the state or twenty-one year olds, but rather stable residents who simply decided to vote this time around.

⁴ William L. Sharkey to Charles D. Fontaine, May 28, 1855; Benjamin P. Dill to Charles D. Fontaine, July 6, 1852 (emphasis original), both in Charles Fontaine Papers, Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH), Jackson, MS, folder 10, folder 7, respectively.

no defined political principles."⁵ What these comments and the voting data suggest, then, is a party system characterized not by a mass of stable and committed partisans but rather a small core of activists who were devoted to the party organization. These activists worked to create enthusiasm among the core voters of each party and to mobilize enough of the "floating vote" to win elections.⁶

The variability of election results showed in the sometimes changing partisanship of individual counties.⁷ Amite County, for instance, was carried by the Whigs in 1847 and 1848, the Democrats in 1849 and State Righters in 1851, the Whigs in 1852 and 1853 and Know-Nothings in 1855, 1856, and 1857, but the Democrats again in 1859. Claiborne county displayed particular inconstancy: Democratic in 1847, Whig in 1848, Democratic in 1849, Unionist in 1851, Democratic in 1852, and Whig in 1853, before supporting Democrats the remainder of the decade. Lowndes and Tishemingo showed the same volatility (Table 4-10). Of course, numerous counties remained staunch supporters of either the Democrats or their opponents, but the variability demonstrated by voters in

⁵ Wiley P. Harris to J. F. H. Claiborne, August 30, 1855, Claiborne Collection, MDAH, box 3, folder 3.

⁶ A classic, nearly exhaustive study of party organization in America that reaches a similar conclusion (among others) is Frank J. Sorauf, *Party Politics in America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1968).

⁷ Most of the county and precinct level election returns in this chapter, and in the entire dissertation, come from ten sample counties: Amite, Bolivar, Carroll, Claiborne, Harrison, Hinds, Jasper, Lowndes, Marshall, and Tishemingo. These counties were selected for a number of reasons: availability of newspapers, geographic distribution throughout the state, variety and representational of agricultural production and social structure, and the quality of surviving election returns.

Amite, Claiborne, and elsewhere illustrated that Mississippi's state and national elections produced changing results.

In light of all this alleged instability--death, coming of age, mobility--why did the Democrats keep winning and the Whig, Know-Nothing, and Opposition parties keep losing? The Democrats won every election during this period in which they ran under their own name, and their majority remained consistent between fifty-two and fifty-seven percent. How could the overall outcome look so similar year after year given the significant turnover among the electorate, as evidenced in Tables 4-2 through 4-9? One possible explanation lies in returns from the precinct level, which, when available, provide a more nuanced perspective on voting behavior.

Returns from several counties suggest that one can trace partisan stability to the local level. Precincts, in other words, tended to maintain their partisanship from one contest to the next. In Amite County, for instance, there were eight voting districts. Between the 1855 and 1859 gubernatorial elections, despite the upheaval of Know Nothingism, none of them changed from Democrat to opposition or vice versa. Although the gross numbers changed significantly over the four-year interval, 412 to 331 for the Know-Nothings but 362 to 338 Democratic in 1859, there was an evident continuity in partisanship and competition within the precincts. Democratic precincts included Zion Hill (38-23 in 1855, 46-18 in 1859) and Talbert's (99-47 and 76-25); while the opposition relied on Thickwood (50-13 and 26-13) and Toler's (22-1 and 37-7). The most closely competitive precinct in 1855 remained as such four years later, Tickfaw going against the

Democrats in both elections, 50-49 and 40-38. The other three precincts became more evenly divided, but failed to alter their allegiance for or against the Democrats.

Precinct returns in Carroll County showed similar trends. Comparisons between the 1853 and 1859 gubernatorial contest, despite dramatically lower turnout in the later election, revealed partisan continuity similar to that in Amite. Of the twelve congruous precincts, eight maintained their loyalties. Democratic districts included Middleton (93-48 and 58-8) and Shongalo (119-53 and 102-14), while the opposition carried LeFlore (28-6 and 11-7), Sidon (33-7 and 25-9), and Adair's (29-19 and 19-12). Given the amount of migration and demographic change that occurred in six years, these correlations proved striking. In other counties, individual precincts showed remarkable congruity. The Democrats carried Utica, in Hinds county, between 1853 and 1859 in successive gubernatorial elections by nearly identical totals: 80-69, 80-63, 80-67, and 71-62. Similarly, the voters at Cayuga registered loyalty to the opposition throughout the same period: 47-27, 49-23, 22-16, and 31-8. This consistency remained despite Hinds County's switch from Whig to Democratic majority. During the 1852 presidential campaign, one of Lowndes County's local squires demonstrated how community context might influence the partisanship of new voters. John Gilmer sent a public letter to his local newspaper, after repeated requests. "I have been so often asked how I intended to vote . . . that there seems to be no mistake that many, who have not had the pleasure of seeing, would like to know where I stand." Gilmer's letter indicated that many of the locals considered his

opinion worthwhile; many immigrants and first-time voters may have listened with respect.⁸

Some precincts, naturally, mirrored the uncertain loyalty and volatile nature of Mississippi's partisan elections. In general, larger precincts showed more instability than smaller, rural districts. The towns of Jackson (Hinds County), Liberty (Amite), Port Gibson and Grand Gulf (Claiborne), and Carrollton (Carroll) recorded the most change. This resulted from the greater number of eligible voters and uncommon mobility characteristic of towns. Still other precincts reflected the steady accretion of Democratic strength throughout the decade, slowly losing their opposition or competitiveness. Despite these exceptions, however, it is safe to conclude that partisan stability existed, somewhat limited though it was, at the local level. In other words, there were Democratic precincts and opposition precincts.

Partisanship, then, seems to have been more a function of residence and community influence than anything else. The origins of those loyalties often lay in early county issues, or patterns of initial settlement. As men moved into a region, teenagers came of age, and those previously inactive became voters, their choice of party was often decided by the existing division within each neighborhood or community. For stable residents, of course, family tradition often provided the basis of party loyalty among the rising generation. As politician Wiley P. Harris remembered: "I found myself a democrat without being able to explain why I was of that party. My uncle was a staunch Jackson man and I adopted his

⁸ *Southern Standard*, August 7, 1852.

preferences without examination." Harris further testified to the unimportance of national issues or "partisan ideology." "I began therefore as a follower of Jackson knowing nothing of the Force Bill, regarding "nullification" as a heresy without knowing what it meant."⁹ Although the precincts offered a measure of steady partisanship, the dominant impression of Mississippi's state and national contests was nonetheless one of fluidity and uncertainty.¹⁰

⁹ Wiley P. Harris, "Autobiography of Wiley P. Harris," in Dunbar Rowland, ed., *Courts, Judges, and Lawyers of Mississippi 1798-1935* (Jackson, MS: Herman Brothers, 1935), 287. Another contemporary remembered the influence of his college professor, a staunch Whig of the Clay/Webster school. Frank A. Montgomery, *Reminiscences of a Mississippian in Peace and War* (Cincinnati: The Robert Clarke Co. Press, 1901), 6-11. Nearly every study by historians and political scientists concludes that the greatest influence on one's partisan choice is family tradition. Among many others, see Jean Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983); Eleanor E. Maccoby, Richard E. Matthews, and Alton S. Morton, "Youth and Political Change," in Heinz Eulau, Samuel J. Eldersveld, and Morris Janowitz, eds., *Political Behavior: A Reader in Theory and Research* (Chicago: The Free Press, 1956), 299-307; Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, *The People's Choice* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1952); Robert E. Lane, *Political Ideology: Why the American Common Man Believes What He Does* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962).

¹⁰ Christopher Morris, "Town and Country in the Old South: Vicksburg and Warren County, Mississippi, 1770-1860," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Florida, 1991, traces the partisan patterns in one Mississippi county. He demonstrates that voters passed their "idiosyncratic" local voting patterns on to party loyalties. "When state government became more important, and elections for governor became more contested, neighborhoods extended their idiosyncratic patterns to state [partisan] elections" (361). See also Paula Baker, "The Culture of Politics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Community and Political Behavior in Rural New York," *Journal of Social History* 89 (June 1984), 167-193. She finds a similar situation in rural New York: "Many of the conflicts that led to partisan divisions in Schoharie [County] were conditioned by the county's history, especially its early settlement patterns" (168). Also Thomas Jeffrey, *State Parties and National Politics: North Carolina, 1815-1861* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 12-90 and *passim*. See also the discussion in Chapter 5.

This emphasis on community context and the force of early patterns of settlement

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As one moved from state to district elections the impact of parties became less significant, accentuating the force of personal factors. One Whig editor expressed a common fear when he admonished his readers: "We hope the Whigs of Warren [County] will not be apathetic in regard to this election merely because the candidate is not personally known to all of them." He hoped that his fellow partisans would support Henry Gray, Whig nominee for Congress, even though he lived on the other side of the state. Democrat Hiram Van Eaton voiced similar sentiments when he wrote to an acquaintance, regarding his party's choice for Congress. He had hoped his friend Stanhope Posey, currently a District Judge, would pursue the nomination. But as the Judge declined any overtures, "I feel little interest in the matter beyond a desire for party harmony & the nomination of some good Democrat." In other words, Van Eaton was willing to

contradicts the prevailing interpretation of the sources of southern partisanship. The conventional argument holds that Whigs were strongest in towns, the plantation belt, and among those farmers more closely connected to "the market;" Democrats favored a "negative state" and predominated among subsistence farmers. The classic origins of this interpretation were two articles by Thomas Alexander and some of his graduate students, "Who Were the Alabama Whigs?" *Alabama Review* 16 (Jan. 1963), 5-19, and "The Basis of Alabama's Ante-Bellum Two-Party System," *Alabama Review* 19 (Oct. 1966), 243-276. Others that echo this same theme include Harry L. Watson, *Jacksonian Politics and Community Conflict: The Emergence of the Second American Party System in Cumberland County, North Carolina* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1981); Marc Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836-1865* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1983); William G. Shade, "Society and Politics in Antebellum Virginia's Southside," *Journal of Southern History* 53 (May 1987), 163-193, although Shade argues for the mediating influence of community; and J. Mills Thornton, III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1978). Finally, of course, the argument for community context, in many ways, goes against any discussion of partisanship as based on ideology--"Whigs believed . . . " or "Democrats thought"

manipulate the convention and use party apparatus to advance his friend's interests, but when it no longer involved such personal associations he became indifferent.¹¹

Charles D. Fontaine's 1853 campaign for Seventh District Judge illustrated the typical mixture of party and personal factors that often characterized district politics. The three-way race also included Phineas T. Scruggs, favored by many Whigs, and John W. Thompson, a recent Democratic convert. Several of Fontaine's correspondents reported lingering effects from the 1851 party confusion. Two years earlier, the Unionists of Marshall County had sent Scruggs to the 1851 convention, while both Fontaine and Thompson lost as State-Rights candidates in Pontotoc and Tippah, respectively. "There are some Union Democrats that are gone for ever [sic]," warned one Fontaine supporter, "and are more dangerous than the most rabid Whig." Others related their attempts to paint Thompson with the brush of Whiggery, presenting Fontaine as the only "true Democrat" in this majority Democratic district.¹² Democrats from DeSoto and Tishomingo Counties expressed their support as Democrats. The latter specifically endorsed Fontaine's stance on the Bond question, "together with other issues," as completely congruent with the their party in that county. His backers from DeSoto pledged their Democratic votes and thought Fontaine could get "some support" from Whigs as well. Letters from E. M. Nichols and others revealed Fontaine's attempts to capture traditionally Whiggish voters, who

¹¹ *Vicksburg Daily Whig*, Oct. 6, 1849; Hiram S. Van Eaton to William Nicholas Whitehurst, Aug. 18, 1858, Whitehurst Papers, MDAH, box 1, folder 7.

¹² H. H. Tyson to Charles D. Fontaine, June 20, 1853; for example, see Joseph Leake to Fontaine, Sept. 23, 1853. All the correspondence relating to this election are in the Fontaine Papers, MDAH, box 2, folders 8 and 9. *Flag of the Union*, Aug. 15, 1851.

expressed their concern about the issue of railroad development. These correspondents reported how they worked to convince Whigs that Fontaine did not oppose railroads, as Scruggs and Thompson had charged. Another Democrat underscored the potential value of party organization when he assured Fontaine that "[y]our name is on our regular [Democratic] ticket and consequently will have a fair show."¹³ Traditional partisan issues, then, remained influential in this district election. Furthermore, the confusion over party labels and voters' loyalty--Whig, Democrat, Union, State Rights--evinced an uncertainty that was commonplace in Mississippi's party politics.

Factors other than parties, however, were also at work in Fontaine's run for the Judgeship. His numerous correspondents repeatedly urged their man to campaign more and to visit each particular region, trying to convey the benefit gained in a personal appearance before the voters. One after another reminded Fontaine that it was imperative voters meet him and hear him speak in person. "You had better visit this County as soon as you can," warned one friend, summarizing the message of many others.¹⁴ Some of Fontaine's men also communicated the advantage gained from prestigious benefactors. One relayed the good news that "Dr. Dandridge is campaigning for you," while another reported Dr. Morris and "all his friends" had come out for Fontaine: "They amount to at least 150 Whigs and the same number of Democrats."¹⁵ Some of Fontaine's informants likewise

¹³ Democrats of DeSoto to Fontaine, October 12, 1853; Democrats of Tishemingo to Fontaine, October 22, 1853; J. F. Cushman to Fontaine, November 5, 1853.

¹⁴ [?] Terrell to Fontaine, August 26, 1853.

¹⁵ J. H. Brown to Fontaine, June 22, 1853.

hinted that party labels would not be decisive. One assured the candidate that his concerns about religion were incorrect: "I think your impression in regard to Scruggs getting the Methodists is all wrong," offered R. S. Rozelle. Furthermore, the disposition of election tickets varied from county to county. "According to the arrangement of the general ticket in this county," wrote one printer from Panola, "the name of no candidates for judge was inserted." This meant, in other words, that voters had to write-in their choice of Fontaine, Scruggs, or Thompson.¹⁶

The disposition of actual tickets--the pieces of paper that voters stuffed into boxes on election day--apparently varied from county to county. One printer notified office-seekers that "[c]andidates for this county wishing their names inserted in the tickets printed at our office will please notify us." Men running for county and local office, then, needed to request their names inserted on party ballots, and potentially one might insert one's name on both party's tickets. Surviving tickets likewise support the argument that parties played little role below the state level. In 1849 Tippah County, Democratic tickets included the names of all state candidates but no judges or district officers. In county races only the names of Daniel Hunt (probate clerk), John F. Ford (ranger), and Henry J. Bickerstaff (coroner) were printed on the ballot. Hunt was the only candidate for probate clerk; Ford was publisher of the local Democratic newspaper, *The Ripley Advertiser*, a position that made him an unusually high-profile partisan and probably accounted for his inclusion on the party ticket. For the remaining offices, including state legislature, other

¹⁶ R. S. Rozelle to Fontaine, September 23, 1853; William R. Allen to Fontaine, Nov. 10, 1853.

county officials, and the Board of Police, voters needed to write in their choice. In Leake County the Democrats printed nearly all the district and county candidates' names on their state ballot. This included regional contests for circuit judge and district attorney, and even those for state senator and representative, suggesting that even those races were not necessarily partisan.¹⁷

The actual returns from Fontaine's (unsuccessful) run for Seventh District Judge support the contention that partisanship had little to do with this election. Scruggs' totals (he was the only acknowledged Whig) indicated no relationship to the Whig vote for Governor in those counties, and comparison to 1851 likewise showed no logical pattern (Table 4-11). Charles Fontaine, the most prominent State-Rights man of the three, made his highest total in Tishemingo, the banner Union county just two years earlier. Demonstrating the importance of residence, Scruggs and Thompson each registered by far his best result in his home county. In short, some partisans who wrote to Fontaine sometimes talked of the election in terms of partisanship and what they perceived to be "party issues." Others, though, saw the contest as one of personal politics. Thus, a combination of party and local, often personal factors apparently characterized district politics in antebellum Mississippi.

¹⁷ *Woodville Republican*, Oct. 14, 1851; "Broadside Collection 1825-1870," MDAH. Other discussions of tickets and their impact on the electoral process include W. Wayne Smith, "Jacksonian Democracy on the Chesapeake: The Political Institutions," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 62 (Dec. 1967), 381-393, who argues that tickets were strictly partisan; and Kenneth J. Winkle, "Ohio's Informal Polling Place: Nineteenth-Century Suffrage in Theory and Practice," in Jeffrey P. Brown and Andrew R. L. Cayton, eds., *The Pursuit of Public Power: Political Culture in Ohio, 1787-1861* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1994), 169-184.

The election discussed by Charles Fontaine and his supporters was typical of district races, and, in particular, of judicial contests. Mississippi pioneered the practice of electing members to the bench, and most men remained committed against making these elections into party contests. Many contemporaries believed the bench should be "above mere party politics." Each side routinely accused their opponents of secretly uniting on one judicial candidate or another, thus perverting the "purity" of the process. Election returns, however, failed to sustain the rhetoric of party editors, indicating instead that judicial elections rarely hinged on partisanship. The data, like those presented in Table 4-11, fail to reach below the county level and as such offer only a crude measurement. However, even a casual examination indicates that the totals simply did not parallel those for governor or other party offices. In addition, judicial contests usually brought out more than two aspirants, reflecting the typical ineffectiveness of the party machinery in regulating candidates below the state level. Editorial bombast to the contrary, the public's attitude towards a partisan judiciary followed idealistic rhetoric and kept politics off the bench. The dominant antiparty tendencies within the state's political culture, then, overwhelmed those editors and party operatives who urged judicial nominations.

Among the Mississippi press, Whig and Independent journals more consistently supported a nonpartisan judiciary. The *Vicksburg Whig* celebrated whenever voters conspicuously ignored partisanship. In one case, after a prominent Whig defeated a known Democrat for Circuit Judge in a majority Democratic district, the editors offered the result as "another evidence that the people will not countenance attempts to make judicial elections partizan in their character." During the 1851 campaign, State-Rights leader J. J.

Deavenport defeated Unionist Richards Barnett in Bolivar County, which never once voted against the Whig or Union parties throughout the antebellum period. The *Whig* recorded the outcome in its usual fashion: "It seems that in this Judicial election, many good men thought proper to vote irrespective of [parties]."¹⁸ Another Whig journal published several attacks on Democratic Judge Stanhope Posey. Witnesses accused him of attending "at the polls on the day of the election, as much interested and as active as the warmest partizan in either party." They expressed further indignation and hoped the public would work to "keep the Judicial ermine free from the mud and filth of partizan warfare."¹⁹ The independent *Southern Standard* avowed that they had never made political opinion an issue in judicial elections, although "in this, we have, as many know, run counter to the heated zeal of partizans."²⁰ Democrats seemed less inclined to complain of a political judiciary. Their greater willingness to make partisanship a test reflected both a genuine dedication to party organization and the benefits of their typical majority. Some Democratic newspapers advocated judicial nominations as early as 1851 or 1853, but the idea did not catch on.

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While Mississippi's district contests exhibited a mixture of partisan and nonpartisan factors, county and local politics rarely involved parties. Voting data from elections for

¹⁸ November 20, 1849, July 15, 1851.

¹⁹ *The Herald and Correspondent*, November 2, 1849.

²⁰ October 18, 1851; also March 26, 1853 editorial, "The Political Judiciary."

county officers, members of the Boards of Police, justices of the peace and constables demonstrated the lack of intensity in Whig-Democratic competition. One measure of the parties' inability to penetrate below the state level was their consistent failure to impose order through nominations. On several occasions, one party or the other suggested nominations at the local level, but voters proved unresponsive, and races for county offices typically brought forth multiple candidates. The parties made few nominations at the county level, excepting candidates for the state legislature. Frequently seven, eight, or as many as ten men vied for positions in county government. In Marshall County, for instance, eleven men ran for probate clerk in 1858.

Many counties demonstrated the tendency for multiple-candidate elections. In Tishemingo, for example, the situation was typically chaotic in 1853: five candidates for coroner, six for ranger, six for assessor, and four for treasurer. Marshall County boasted six men for circuit clerk, five for assessor, and three for treasurer in 1860. Two years earlier there had been five for assessor and three for surveyor. In 1849, Claiborne County had four men run for each treasurer, assessor, and probate clerk. That same year in Amite the voters could choose from five candidates for assessor, five for treasurer, and six for tax collector. Harrison County exhibited a similar pattern. In 1853 there were more than two candidates for coroner, assessor, ranger, treasurer, sheriff, surveyor, and probate clerk. Two years later three men ran for probate clerk, five for coroner, five for assessor, six for ranger, three for treasurer, three for sheriff, and seven for surveyor. Finally, the voters in Warren County could choose from five men for sheriff, three for coroner, three for assessor, and four for county representative, in 1851. In short, there appeared little

evidence of anything like an effective, or even existent party organization in contests for county offices. Between 1849 and 1860, in the ten sample counties, there were 408 elections for the principal county officers.²¹ In those 408 contests, three or more candidates ran in 159 (39.0%) of them, while 171 races (41.9%) had just two candidates.

Even when only two candidates competed for office, the results typically showed little or no relation to that for governor and other state officers. For example, in Jasper County the vote for governor in 1853 was 551 to 310 in favor of Democrat John J. McRae. But for sheriff and surveyor, the only contests with just two candidates, the votes stood 402-394 and 409-391, respectively. In 1851, the voters of Amite split almost evenly between the Union and State-Rights parties, but elections for circuit clerk and treasurer (the only two-candidate races) were not close. The outcome in Lowndes County's 1849 elections exemplified the disorder of local parties. Voters sent three men to the state legislature: one "Democrat," one "Taylor Democrat," and one "Whig." They elected a Democratic sheriff (748-656), a Whig for circuit clerk (899-639), a Democrat for assessor (742-701), a Whig for treasurer (777-662), and Democrats unopposed for coroner, ranger and surveyor. For the Board of Police the voters chose three Democrats and two Whigs to represent the five districts.²²

²¹ Circuit clerk, probate clerk, coroner, assessor, tax collector, ranger, treasurer, sheriff, and surveyor. There were more than 408 elections held, of course, but these represent the surviving returns.

²² Other examples included Hinds County's voters who registered consistent dislike for the Democratic party, but elected Democratic activists B. F. Edwards as circuit clerk in 1853, 1855, and 1860, T. F. Owen as coroner in 1855, and Napoleon B. Ward as circuit clerk in 1849. In Carroll County, the voters supported Whig Francis Rogers in

In those elections where local officials recorded precinct-level data, the lack of partisanship often became more evident. The cases offered in Tables 4-12, 4-13, and 4-14 are examples of how county-level data can mislead. While the overall totals for county officers seemed analogous to party votes, the precincts showed little relation. These data are similarly presented in Figures 4-1 through 4-5, in which each point corresponds to the percent of votes cast for the winning candidate at each precinct. Had partisanship extended from the governor's race to these elections the lines would parallel one another. Instead, the wild fluctuations point out that despite very similar county totals, precinct figures betrayed an essential incongruity. Furthermore, these contests represented some of the few that featured two equally viable opponents. Numerous others involved three or more competitive candidates or two unequal rivals. For example, in 1851 Marshall County's voters split evenly between the two state parties, 1380 to 1350 in favor of Jefferson Davis for governor. But the races for coroner and ranger were completely one-sided (1607-114 and 1423-595, respectively); while the contest for treasurer involved five viable candidates (932-736-473-337-172). Newspapers likewise demonstrated the characteristic nonpartisanship of county politics, often in graphic form. The *Vicksburg Whig*, for instance, printed the Whig state ticket in the left column of page three during the 1853 campaign. All the other candidates for county and local offices appeared in a different column and without any indication of party affiliation. Other publications, *The Mississippian* for example, made generic announcements for each local candidate.

1853, but chose Democratic state delegate Andrew M. Nelson as probate clerk.

Figure 4-1
 Carroll County, 1853: Governor and Treasurer

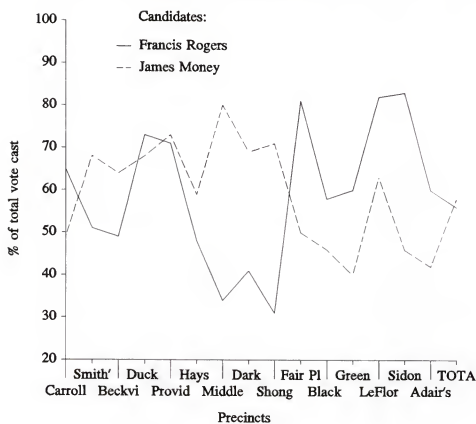


Figure 4-2
Claiborne County, 1853: Governor and Treasurer

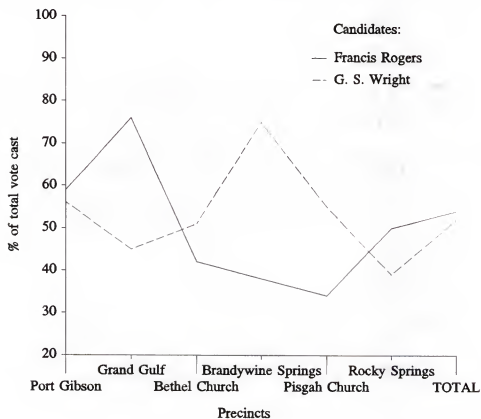


Figure 4-3

Hinds County, 1849: Governor, Sheriff, Circuit Clerk

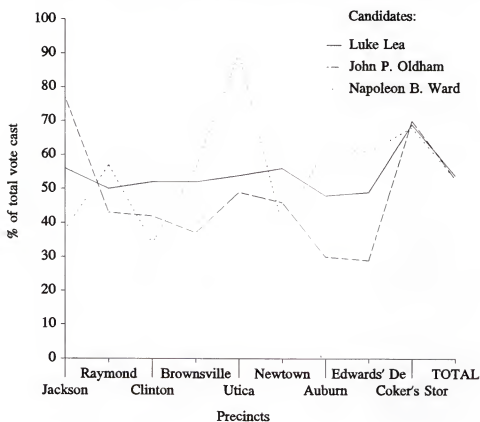


Figure 4-4
Hinds County, 1853: Governor and Sheriff

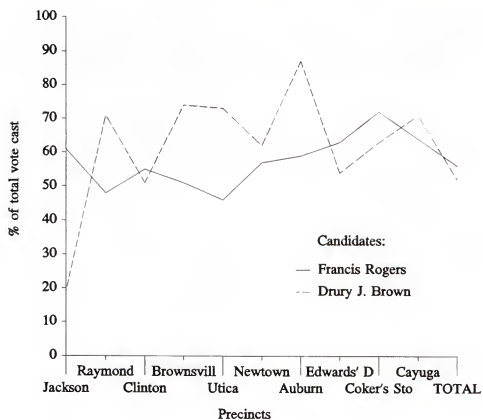
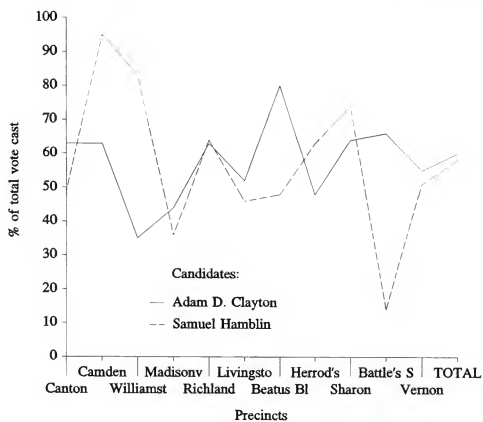


Figure 4-5
Madison County, 1843: Governor and Sheriff



Elections for county representative proved to be the only local contests that commonly turned on partisanship. The formalized competition resulted largely from party leaders' ability to control, and the voters' willingness, usually, to accept the nominations that county convention delegates almost invariably made. In addition, the state legislature dealt with questions that touched on "party issues"--choosing U. S. Senators and drawing Congressional boundaries, for example. Editors routinely classified their representatives as belonging to one or the other party, and in their legislative activity they sometimes cooperated in a predictable manner.²³ Still, some evidence indicated that voters did not automatically extend partisanship to races for county representative. Other factors, particularly the impact of friendship and kinship, exemplified by the importance of residence demonstrated their relative capacity to overcome the force of partisanship.

In closely contested counties it took only a few switching voters to break down party stability. In 1851, voters in Marshall County favored Jefferson Davis's party by a slim margin, 1380-1350, but sent two Union and two State-Rights men to the legislature. In the same year, Lowndes County's men also chose Davis for governor, but selected three Unionists as representatives. The future Confederate president polled 681 votes, but the best any State-Rights legislative candidate could do was 650. The three winners got 750, 723, and 660. Two years later voters in Lowndes opted for one "Whig," one "Union Democrat," and one "State-Rights Democrat." At other times, the vote for state legislature

²³ On the Mississippi legislature see especially Melvin Philip Lucas, "The Development of the Second Party System in Mississippi, 1817-1846," Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 1983.

appeared completely unrelated to party totals. The men of Harrison County, for instance, supported Democrat John J. McRae convincingly in 1855, 430-240. But in the legislative race, John L. Henley squeaked past Robert Saffold, 307-300. Finally, sheer chaos reigned in some legislative elections. In 1849 Tishomingo County boasted thirteen competitive candidates for four seats in Jackson. The voters' usual Democratic majority held up for Governor John Quitman, 1432-734, but no future representative could gather more than 918 votes.²⁴ In the majority of elections for the state legislature between 1845 and 1860 partisanship usually held, but these and other cases demonstrated that even in races usually assumed to be partisan, it was not always true.

Another measure of Mississippi's ingrained antipartyism was the enduring competition for county and local offices in the late 1850s, despite state races becoming hopelessly one-sided. After the state elections in 1855, Mississippians began holding their county and local elections in even-numbered years, separate from state offices. Therefore, the governor and cabinet were elected in 1857 and 1859 while voters chose new county officials in 1858 and 1860. The Democrats carried the state easily in both 1857 and 1859 with majorities near two-thirds, and public enthusiasm lagged as turnout fell to about fifty-five percent (Table 4-1). Party editors likewise noticed a declining interest in state elections. Long-time Whig, Know Nothing, and Opposition leader George W. Harper noted in 1857 that "this has certainly been the mildest political canvass that we have ever witnessed. So far as all this region is concerned, no interest whatever has been shown by

²⁴ The totals were 918-819-778-770-763-653-631-567-514-369-312-215-213.

either party." In Panola County the situation seemed similar. "The usual interest manifested in State Elections has, at the present time, almost totally vanished." But in 1858 and 1860 county races remained warmly contested and, significantly, voter turnout remained near the normal level of eighty percent.²⁵

Results from Carroll County demonstrated these statewide trends with unusual clarity. In 1857 turnout fell to an all-time low of 34.1 percent and in 1859 rebounded barely over one-half. In both elections the Democratic candidate garnered nearly seventy percent. In 1858, however, nearly nine out of ten eligible voters participated and competition remained fierce. In the sheriff's race, for example, Frank Pleasants beat J. C. McKenzie 857 to 834. All the other county offices except treasurer had close contests as well. Two years later turnout approached one hundred percent and the elections remained close. Elsewhere, the Democrats carried Harrison County 508 to 30 in 1859; while the next year's election for sheriff was 262-259 and for treasurer 219-208-75. In Lowndes County, Democrats won the gubernatorial elections of 1857 and 1859 by huge margins (908-83 and 1004-35), but county races remained close. Other counties exhibited similar trends, a summary of data from the ten sample counties appears in Table 4-15. The high

²⁵ *Hinds County Gazette*, Sept. 30, 1857; *Weekly Panola Star*, Oct. 21, 1857; Benjamin L. C. Wailes Diary, Oct. 3, 1859, MDAH, microfilm. Wailes recorded on election day in 1859: "Not much interest taken except in the county [election for state legislator]." This contradicts Harry Watson's claim: "In the 1850s, when leading politicians reached a consensus on these questions [issues of economic development], popular interest in politics slackened considerably." This may be true if one's horizon fails to extend beyond party politics, but it fails to account for most political activity in Mississippi. See "Conflict and collaboration: yeomen, slaveholders, and politics in the antebellum South," *Social History* 10 (Oct. 1985), 275.

rates of turnout suggested that county politics remained "business as usual," and perhaps the chief reason voters went to the polls at all. County and local elections drew out voters in equal if not greater numbers than state and national contests--precisely when politics mattered most, parties had no influence. These voting trends bolster the judgement of historians who argue that nineteenth-century county government was more important for most people because that was the only legal authority they ever experienced. National and even state officials, contrarily, seemed remote and much less tangible. Most men, on the other hand, had direct experience with the county tax assessor, tax collector, and sheriff, and one's member on the Board of Police made more immediately important decisions than one's representative in Jackson.²⁶

One more indication of the negligible intensity generated by Whig-Democratic contests was the greater partisanship demonstrated by voters in the 1851 elections. In other words, it took something special to elicit a real enthusiasm for parties and commitment to candidates aligned with one side or the other. Most voters apparently found traditional Whig and Democratic rhetoric uninspiring, but slavery, honor, and possible secession

²⁶ On the relatively greater importance of county government, see esp. Robert Kenzer, *Kinship and Neighborhood in a Southern Community: Orange County, North Carolina, 1849-1881* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987), and the discussion in Chapter V. Burton W. Folsom II reached a similar conclusion about the reasons for high voter turnout in Jacksonian elections. He demonstrated that in Georgia, Tennessee, and North Carolina, at least, voters registered their greatest turnout in state elections before the hoopla of 1840. See "Party Formation and Development in Jacksonian America: the Old South," *Journal of American Studies* 7 (Dec. 1973), 217-229. The opposing view, that national issues and presidential elections brought men to the polls, is epitomized by Richard P. McCormick, *The Second American Party System: Party Formation in the Jacksonian Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), which has inspired a host of followers.

suddenly made parties important. Election returns from 1851 indicated a somewhat greater tendency to extend partisanship to the county level. Ironically, of course, leaders of both sides made the rhetoric of antipartyism particularly intense that year and many more voters than usual switched loyalties. The possibility of disunion presented such an imperative that some Mississippians made the question central to all politics.

In Hinds County the disunion crisis of 1851 reached down to the race for probate court clerk. "Many voters" wrote to *The Mississippian* to ascertain the partisanship of each candidate running for the office. "It having been laid down as a rule to carry the [current] party question into every election," they declared, "we desire respectfully to propound to you the following questions." The inquiries dealt solely with the Compromise and related sectional issues. Incumbent probate clerk William H. Hampton replied in the subsequent issue that he was a Unionist and intended to vote for Henry Foote. "While I deprecate the system of making political opinions a test of qualification of ministerial office," he wearily pronounced, "I yet accord to my fellow-citizens the right to demand of candidates for public favor their opinions on any political questions that may agitate the country." Hampton further asserted that he had always acted in a nonpartisan manner while in office, and if reelected would again "leave the discussion of political questions to politicians."²⁷ On another occasion, during a debate at Edward's Depot (also in Hinds), one local man announced his candidacy for clerk of the chancery court. Someone in the crowd

²⁷ *The Mississippian*, July 18 and 25, 1851. The other three candidates made similar replies in the same issue.

immediately yelled at him, asking if he intended to vote for Quitman or Foote, to which the candidate replied immediately--Quitman.²⁸

These incidents illustrated how powerfully divisive the issue of disunion became, and its potential to disrupt the normal routine of county politics. The acute sense of partisanship may have reflected, at least partly, the peculiarities of Hinds County. Jackson the capital, of course, was "alive with politics" as both parties routinely held conventions in the city and unlike most areas the voters enjoyed two regular, opposing partisan newspapers. More than the usual number of rallies, conventions and meetings in the city that year further intensified the political atmosphere. In short, Hinds was somewhat atypical in its potential for heightened partisanship.

Nearby Carroll County, however, also displayed some of the same characteristics that year. Like Hinds, Carroll had a large town (by antebellum Mississippi standards) with two competing partisan newspapers. Carrollton was also close enough to Jackson that the two city's politicians intermingled. Carroll, for instance, typically sent, after Hinds, the most delegates to each party's state convention. The precinct returns for probate clerk, circuit court clerk, and assessor showed some relation to those for state offices (Table 4-16 and Figure 4-6). While the totals varied slightly, as did some of the precincts, they revealed a definite congruency (compare to Figure 4-1, for instance). Furthermore, long-time probate clerk Andrew M. Nelson lost his only election: he was a high-profile State-

²⁸ *The Mississippian*, Aug, 8, 1851. Also in Hinds County, "Many Voters" asked judicial candidates Richards Barnett and J. J. Deavenport their position on the Compromise issues. See the *Flag of the Union*, June 20, 1851.

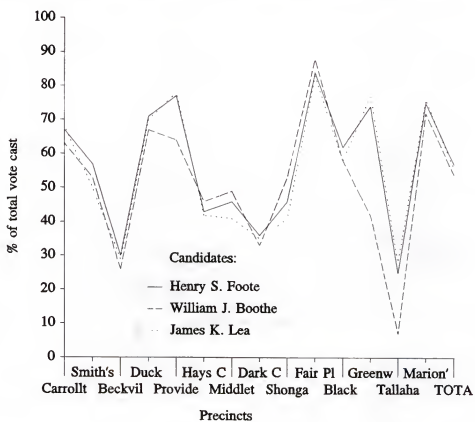
Rights partisan in a county that supported the Unionists. On the other hand, races for sheriff (five candidates) and treasurer (three) conformed to the traditional pattern. One other indicator of greater partisanship lay in the number of contests that featured just two candidates. In Jasper County, for example, the races for sheriff, circuit court clerk, coroner, treasurer, and surveyor each uncharacteristically included only two men. Their respective votes vaguely resembled the party totals, although any correlation remained tentative.²⁹

In Holmes County the Unionists at Botter's Store precinct likewise resolved to carry partisanship into local contests. They averred their belief that the current crisis was "of such vital importance to freemen, and to struggling liberty, . . . as to make it the duty of the Union men to support the candidates of the Union party, for the political offices of both State and County." They realized that this was a departure from custom, and added that Unionists ought to vote the straight party ticket "regardless of former party distinctions or personal considerations." Possible secession, then, seemed important enough to override the usual basis for local voting: "personal considerations" of kinship, friends and neighbors.³⁰

²⁹ The greatest exception to local nonpartisanship, however, was the Know-Nothing success of 1855-56, discussed in Chapter 7.

³⁰ *Flag of the Union*, May 30, 1851.

Figure 4-6
 Carroll County, 1851: Governor, Assessor, Probate Clerk



Yet, the power of this crisis to affect local politics remained limited. Among the other sample counties, Amite, Bolivar, Claiborne, Harrison, Lowndes and Marshall gave no indication that the new parties had any meaningful effect on county politics. Only a few instances of voters demanding that candidates reveal their party loyalty appeared in newspapers or private correspondence. Voting data were hardly uniform and in only a few places did men appear to take their partisanship into county contests. The defining characteristics of county politics continued to be multiple-candidate elections and nonpartisanship. One contemporary summed up the state's partisan spectrum when he reflected after the war:

Elections before the war were simple affairs to what they have since become in Mississippi. In the election of county officers, politics was unknown; Whigs and Democrats ran as they pleased, and were voted for without regard to their politics. The same was true of judges, who were then elective. Only in the election of state officers, members of the legislature, congress and in presidential elections was the line drawn.³¹

According to this contemporary, then, the nonpartisanship characteristic in elections for county officers extended to the local level and contests for the Board of Police, justice of the peace, and constable. These local administrators often brought the law and government directly to Mississippians and were the most familiar public officials for many people.

³¹ Montgomery, *Reminiscences of a Mississippian in Peace and War*, 38. Or as another contemporary phrased it: "[W]hen I vote for men to fill political positions, I vote for principles, and when I vote for men to fill ministerial [county] offices, I select those whom I believe most competent." *The Wilkinson Advertiser*, May 19, 1858.

Numerous cases of partisans elected in opposition districts confirmed the irrelevance of party affiliation in these local contests.³² In Amite County, the voters in Thickwood and at Toler's box supported the Opposition candidates for governor in 1857 and 1859 (45-9 and 63-20). Yet, they elected Democrats Henry G. Street and C. C. Lea for JOP in 1858 and 1859, respectively. In Carroll's district three, carried by Know-Nothing Charles Fontaine in 1855, voters chose Democratic state delegate Patrick H. Brown as their man for the Board of Police that year. Democrat Henry Matthews was named JOP of the Whiggish Duck Hill precinct in 1849. Municipal elections produced similar cases. The residents of anti-Democratic Carrollton returned prominent Democrat William W. Hart to the town council year after year; as well as State-Rights Democrat William Cothran.

The voters in Hinds County showed a similar disregard for party politics when choosing their local officials.³³ Long-time Democrat Drury J. Brown was elected JOP of the Raymond precinct in 1849 despite its voters' support for Whig Luke Lea. In the same election Democrat William H. Dean won the race for JOP in Newtown, another Whig precinct. Democratic constable John A. Gallman won reelection in the Raymond-Coker's Store precinct in successive elections between 1849 and 1853, despite the area's consistent

³² Identifying the partisanship of local candidates is, of course, the central problem. Lists of delegates to county, district, and state conventions are the most reliable and accessible means of locating partisans. Since so relatively few men ever became delegates, it is difficult to classify many of them.

³³ Hinds partisans are the easiest to identify because the county habitually sent the most delegates to state conventions. In addition, *The Mississippian* reported on every local Democratic meeting and caucus.

Whiggish majority. The heated contest of 1851, in fact, apparently had no effect on these local contests. State-Rights delegate A. K. Barlow won election unopposed in the Edward's Depot precinct, which voted for Governor Foote 63 to 40. Perhaps most strikingly, Jackson's voters, who gave the Unionists a two hundred-vote majority, chose as their JOP Henry J. Shackleford--chairman of the State-Rights committee of arrangements. Democratic precincts proved equally magnanimous towards their opponents. James W. White, a Whig, won election as JOP in Clinton in 1859, which gave Democrat John Pettus nearly sixty-five percent for governor. Finally, voters in Whiggish Port Gibson elected two JOPs, Emilius Bruuer and Lemuel O. Bridewell: the town's Whig and Democratic editors, respectively.³⁴

These and other cases demonstrated that like elections for county officers, voters typically ignored partisanship in local contests. If parties failed to provide leadership in most politics, what did? The following chapters will demonstrate that residence was an important, perhaps the critical factor in county and local elections. Furthermore, a hierarchy of offices, corresponding to the social structure in which they operated, characterized local politics. In short, the local political culture in part reflected, and in part helped to create the overall social and cultural hierarchy of antebellum Mississippi.

³⁴ *Port Gibson Reveille*, Nov. 9, 1853.

TABLE 4-1
Estimated Turnout, 1848-1860

1848	President	83.5%
1849	Governor	87.8
1851	Governor	84.3
1852	President	65.0
1853	Governor	80.8
1855	Governor	83.0
1856	President	80.5
1857	Governor	53.6
1859	Governor	55.8
1860	President	87.0

TABLE 4-2
Estimated Relationships Between Voters
1851 Governor and 1852 President

Table 4-2.a
1851 to 1852

1851 1852	Union (Foote)	State Rights (Davis)	Nonvoters
Whig (Scott)	52.3	0.0	0.0
Democrat (Pierce)	35.7	51.2	11.8
Nonvoters	11.9	48.8	88.2
Totals	99.9	100.0	100.0

Table 4-2.b
1852 from 1851

1851 1852	Union (Foote)	State Rights (Davis)	Nonvoters	Totals
Whig (Scott)	100.0%	0.0	5.3	100.0
Democrat (Pierce)	39.5	55.3	5.3	100.1
Nonvoters	12.5	50.0	37.5	100.0

TABLE 4-3
Estimated Relationships Between Voters
1852 President and 1855 Governor

Table 4-3.a
1852 to 1855

1852 1855	Whig (Scott)	Democrat (Pierce)	Nonvoters
American (Fontaine)	62.5%	17.5	19.4
Democrat (McRae)	0.0	82.5	19.4
Nonvoters	37.5	0.0	61.1
Totals	100.0	100.0	99.9

Table 4-3.b
1855 from 1852

1852 1855	Whig (Scott)	Democrat (Pierce)	Nonvoters	Totals
American (Fontaine)	51.7%	24.1	24.1	99.9
Democrat (McRae)	0.0	82.5	17.5	100.0
Nonvoters	29.0	0.0	71.0	100.0

TABLE 4-4
Estimated Relationships Between Voters
1855 Governor and 1856 President

Table 4-4.a
1855 to 1856

1855 1856	American (Fontaine)	Democrat (McRae)	Nonvoters
American (Fillmore)	73.5%	0.0	24.0
Democrat (Buchanan)	26.5	82.9	0.0
Nonvoters	0.0	17.1	76.0
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 4-4.b
1856 from 1855

1855 1856	American (Fontaine)	Democrat (McRae)	Nonvoters	Totals
American (Fillmore)	80.6%	0.0	19.4	100.0
Democrat (Buchanan)	20.9	79.1	0.0	100.0
Nonvoters	0.0	26.9	73.1	100.0

TABLE 4-5
Estimated Relationships Between Voters
1856 President and 1857 Governor

Table 4-5.a
1856 to 1857

1856 1857	American (Fillmore)	Democrat (Buchanan)	Nonvoters
Opposition (Yerger)	61.3%	0.0	10.0
Democrat (McWillie)	9.7	49.0	15.0
Nonvoters	29.0	51.0	75.0
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 4-5.b
1857 from 1856

1856 1857	American (Fillmore)	Democrat (Buchanan)	Nonvoters	Totals
Opposition (Yerger)	90.5%	0.0	9.5	100.0
Democrat (McWillie)	10.0	49.0	10.0	100.0
Nonvoters	18.4	51.0	30.6	100.0

TABLE 4-6
Estimated Relationships Between Voters
1855 Governor and 1857 Governor

Table 4-6.a
1855 to 1857

1855 1857	American (Fontaine)	Democrat (McRae)	Nonvoters
Opposition (Yerger)	50.0%	0.0	17.2
Democrat (McWillie)	16.7	46.3	10.3
Nonvoters	33.3	53.7	72.4
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 4-6.b
1857 from 1855

1855 1857	American (Fontaine)	Democrat (McRae)	Nonvoters	Totals
Opposition (Yerger)	75.0%	0.0	25.0	100.0
Democrat (McWillie)	18.5	70.4	11.1	100.0
Nonvoters	18.9	41.5	39.6	100.0

TABLE 4-7
Estimated Relationships Between Voters
1857 Governor and 1859 Governor

Table 4-7.a
1857 to 1859

1857 1859	Opposition (Yerger)	Democrat (McWillie)	Nonvoters
Opposition (Walter)	60.0	0.0	2.0
Democrat (Pettus)	0.0	64.7	25.5
Nonvoters	40.0	35.3	72.5
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 4-7.b
1859 from 1857

1857 1859	Opposition (Yerger)	Democrat (McWillie)	Nonvoters	Totals
Opposition (Walter)	90.0%	0.0	10.0	100.0
Democrat (Pettus)	0.0	62.9	37.1	100.0
Nonvoters	10.9	21.8	67.3	100.0

TABLE 4-8
Estimated Relationships Between Voters
1859 Governor and 1860 President

Table 4-8.a
1859 to 1860

1859 1860	Opposition (Walter)	Democrat (Pettus)	Nonvoters
Cons. Union (Bell)	80.0%	14.8	28.3
N. Democrat (Douglas)	10.0	0.0	5.7
S. Democrat (Breck'ge)	10.0	70.3	28.3
Nonvoters	0.0	18.9	37.7
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 4-8.b
1860 from 1859

1859 1860	Opposition (Walter)	Democrat (Pettus)	Nonvoters	Totals
Cons. Union (Bell)	29.6%	14.8	55.6	100.0
N. Democrat (Douglas)	25.0	0.0	75.0	100.0
S. Democrat (Breck'ge)	2.4	61.9	35.7	100.0
Nonvoters	0.0	25.9	74.1	100.0

TABLE 4-9
Estimated Relationships Between Voters
1856 President and 1860 President

Table 4-9.a
1856 to 1860

1856 1860	American (Fillmore)	Democrat (Buchanan)	Nonvoters
Cons. Union (Bell)	84.8%	0.0	10.5
N. Democrat (Douglas)	9.1	0.0	5.3
S. Democrat (Breck'ge)	6.1	70.8	36.8
Nonvoters	0.0	29.2	47.4
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 4-9.b
1860 from 1856

1856 1860	American (Fillmore)	Democrat (Buchanan)	Nonvoters	Totals
Cons. Union (Bell)	93.3%	0.0	6.7	100.0
N. Democrat (Douglas)	75.5	0.0	25.0	100.0
S. Democrat (Breck'ge)	4.7	79.1	16.3	100.1
Nonvoters	0.0	60.9	39.1	100.0

TABLE 4-10
 Variability of Partisanship in Selected Counties, 1847-1860

Year	Amite turnout	Claiborne turnout	Lowndes turnout	Tishomingo turnout
1847	Whig NA	Dem. 86.8	Whig 90.6	Dem. 79.8
1848	Whig 99.3	Whig 90.5	Whig 99.9	Dem. 92.3
1849	Dem. 92.7	Dem. 86.4	Dem. 92.6	Dem. 87.7
1851	S-R 94.8	Union 76.3	S-R 81.2	Union 88.6
1852	Whig 73.6	Dem. 69.5	Dem. 76.7	Dem. 71.0
1855	Whig 99.5	Whig 74.8	Whig 90.6	Whig 90.7
1855	K-N 75.6	Dem. 67.6	K-N 83.1	Dem. 80.3
1856	K-N 92.6	Dem. 86.4	Dem. 79.9	Dem. 80.9
1857	Opp. 77.2	Dem. 56.8	Dem. 57.9	NA
1858	Dem. 76.2	Dem. 54.4	Dem. 59.4	Opp. 60.7
1860	Dem. 57.9	Dem. 56.2	Dem. 64.8	Dem. 58.6

TABLE 4-11
1853 Seventh District Judge

county	F'aine 1853	Scr'gs 1853	Th'psn 1853	Whig 1853	Dem. 1853	Union 1851	S-R. 1851
DeSoto	720	727	429	875	983	1012	668
Ita'ba	723	786	772	1048	1204	1036	668
Laf'te	546	488	476	688	809	801	636
Mar'll	746	1239	540	1108	1362	1360	1162
Panola	172	394	544	580	539	550	280
Tippah	649	910	1250	1309	1477	1542	860
Tish'o	1102	1123	436	1427	1355	1765	379
totals	4658	5667	4447	7035	7729	8066	4654

F'aine = Charles D. Fontaine

Scr'gs = Phineas T. Scruggs

Th'psn = John W. Thompson

Ita'ba = Itawamba

Laf'te = Lafayette

Mar'll = Marshall

Tish'o = Tishomingo

TABLE 4-12
 Carroll County, 1853
 Governor and County Treasurer

candidates precincts	Rogers (Whig)	McRae (Dem.)	James Money	Jno. P. Marshall
TOTAL	899	714	900	653
Carrollton	293	159	218	231
Smith's Mills	59	57	73	35
Beckville	33	45	42	29
Duck Hill	71	26	62	29
Providence	26	8	16	6
Hays Creek	48	51	62	43
Middleton	42	93	119	29
Dark Corner	27	39	45	20
Shongalo	53	119	119	48
Fair Play	30	7	16	16
Black Hawk	80	58	62	72
Greenwood	47	31	30	45
LeFlore	28	6	17	10
Sidon	33	7	16	19
Adair's	29	19	19	26

TABLE 4-13
 Claiborne County, 1853
 Governor and County Treasurer

candidates precincts	Rogers (Whig)	McRae (Dem.)	G. S. Wright	J. L. Foote
TOTAL	366	310	357	326
Port Gibson	143	100	142	113
Grand Gulf	92	29	54	66
Bethel Church	22	30	25	24
Brandywine Springs	24	39	44	15
Pisgah Church	29	57	48	40
Rocky Springs	56	55	44	68

TABLE 4-14
Hinds County, 1849 and 1853
Governor and Sheriff

	1849				1853			
	Governor		Sheriff		Governor		Sheriff	
	L. Lea	Quitman	Oldham	Thomas	Rogers	McRae	Brown	Taylor
TOTAL	1014	875	956	956	1029	810	939	860
Jackson	318	247	415	123	328	211	95	433
Raymond	175	172	142	189	170	186	245	110
Clinton	90	83	70	96	93	77	67	84
Brownsville	101	94	67	415	81	70	113	39
Utica	107	92	95	100	69	80	111	41
Newtown	67	52	53	62	58	43	56	35
Auburn	52	57	31	70	37	26	53	8
Edwards Dep.	62	65	36	88	72	43	61	53
Cokers Store	42	19	42	18	76	29	62	36
Cayuga	-	-	-	-	47	27	52	21

TABLE 4-15
Rates of Turnout, 1857-1860

year & election county	1857 Governor	1858 Sheriff	1859 Governor	1860 Sheriff
Amite	76.2	83.9	76.2	86.3
Bolivar	69.1	93.4	60.5	107.0
Carroll	34.1	91.2	93.4	97.0
Harrison	53.0	N/A	58.5	56.9
Hinds	56.4	N/A	65.8	63.4
Jasper	75.8	83.4	76.8	82.6
Lowndes	57.9	80.8	59.4	71.0
Marshall	54.8	76.1	61.4	74.0
Tishomingo	N/A	79.7	60.7	81.9

Due to the rapid population growth in Bolivar after 1855-56, the number of eligible voters may be distorted, i.e., not consistent with calculations based on uniform demographic growth.

Data from Claiborne county was not available in 1858 and 1860.

TABLE 4-16
 Carroll County, 1851
 Assessor and Probate Clerk

	Assessor		Probate Clerk	
	Boothe	Ramsey	J. K. Lea	Nelson
TOTAL	905	766	951	746
Carrollton	320	184	347	166
Smith's Mills	42	37	40	40
Beckville	22	62	25	62
Duck Hill	66	33	69	40
Providence	30	17	35	40
Hays Creek	56	67	58	71
Middleton	73	75	58	85
Dark Corner	32	64	34	62
Shongalo	109	98	114	121
Fair Play	28	4	25	5
Black Hawk	71	51	69	49
Greenwood	39	54	71	21
Tallahatchie	1	13	4	10
Marion	26	10	28	9

CHAPTER 5

POLITICS AND THE NEIGHBORHOOD

As the previous chapter demonstrated, election returns betrayed the inconsistency of editorial partisan rhetoric with seemingly haphazard voting behavior and a lack of commitment among many Whigs and Democrats. Rather than a stable system of partisans driven by ideology, Mississippi's politics reflected a myriad of contending local interests. Formal activities such as voting, and barbecues and rallies were organized around neighborhoods. Party loyalty often turned on community context: there were Democratic and opposition precincts whose allegiance failed to change over many years, and amid tumultuous demographic changes. In local politics voters typically supported men who lived near themselves, out of kinship, friendship, or patron-cliental duty. Finally, lawmakers in Jackson and on the Boards of Police (miniature legislatures for each county) even codified the neighborhood as a legal unit. County "administration" further reflected Mississippi's pre-partisan political culture: elected officials relied on the local gentry to conduct elections, take care of the poor and administer public funds. The neighborhood community, in short, was the foundation of politics.

Many American historians have debated the changing nature of "community." In the 1970s and 1980s this dialogue focused on the colonial era, particularly New England and a perceived breakdown of community cohesiveness and dissolution of a consensual

way of life in the eighteenth century. Replacing relative stasis, cooperation and a shared purpose was an open, mobile and highly voluntaristic social order.¹ Studies of nineteenth-century communities usually begin with the assumption of widespread mobility, a lack of face-to-face relationships among individuals and focus on attempts to "build" a community out of the seeming chaos of dizzying demographic turnover.² Others maintain that

¹ Among others, this unites the work of John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Kenneth Lockridge, *A New England Town, the First Hundred Years: Dedham, Massachusetts, 1636-1736* (New York: Norton, 1970); Michael Zuckerman, *Peaceable Kingdoms: New England Towns in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970); James Henretta, "Families and Farms: *Mentalite* in Pre-Industrial America," *William and Mary Quarterly* 35 (1981), 3-32. Critics contend that colonial communities never represented "little commonwealths," and emphasize production for the market, individual competition, and a fluid social structure from the beginning. See Winifred Rothenberg, "The Market and Massachusetts Farmers, 1750-1855," *Journal of Economic History* XLI (1981): 283-314; Stephen Innes, *Labor in a New Land: Economy and Society in Seventeenth-Century Springfield* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Stephanie Grauman Wolf, *Urban Village: Population, Community, and Family Structure in Germantown, Pennsylvania, 1683-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976). Among many summaries of this literature, one is Darrett Rutman, "Assessing the Little Communities of Early America," *William and Mary Quarterly* 43 (April 1986): 163-178. Anthropologists and sociologists, of course, also confront the problem of community. Two summaries of some of their vast literature are Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory: A History of Theories of Culture* (New York: Crowell, 1968), esp. ch. 9; Colin Bell and Howard Newby, *Community Studies: An Introduction to the Sociology of the Local Community* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971). One study of the importance of neighborhood in contemporary politics is Matthew A. Crenson, *Neighborhood Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

² See for example Don Harrison Doyle, "Social Theory and New Communities in Nineteenth-Century America," *Western Historical Quarterly* 8 (April 1977): 151-165, and *The Social Order of a Frontier Community: Jacksonville, Illinois 1825-1870* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1978); Richard S. Alcorn, "Leadership and Stability in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America: A Case Study of an Illinois Town," *Journal of American History* 61 (Dec. 1974): 685-702; Robert H. Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968). The classic theoretical articulation of this position was Allan G. Bogue, "Social Theory and the Pioneer," *Agricultural History* 34 (Jan. 1960): 21-34.

communities remained stable despite a generally mobile population because not only did underlying cultural ethics remain constant, but the social and economic elite tended to stay behind. This created a basically stable community into which a moving column of population naturally fitted itself.³ In such an environment, local leadership fell to those elite persisters who formed and re-formed networks of extended kin, neighbors and dependents--in short, stability with mobility.⁴

In this chapter I argue that neighborhood communities in rural 1850s Mississippi exhibited much cohesiveness and solidarity, not unlike the colonial towns described above. Despite considerable demographic turnover, most Mississippians remained tied to a local network of exchanges and face-to-face relationships. Life was lived on a small scale,

³ See, for example, Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967). He contends that America was still a nation of stable "island communities" into the late nineteenth century, although without directly addressing the issue of mobility. A classic statement of the potentially unifying force of a national value framework within changing local identities is Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955). Much of this literature is summarized by Doyle, "Social Theory and New Communities," and Alcorn, "Leadership and Stability." For the unifying power of honor in the South, see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

⁴ The effects of mobility on local politics are still only partly understood and not always addressed by historians. As dozens of studies of nineteenth-century communities have demonstrated, Americans both urban and rural were seemingly in constant motion. The effect on community power relationships, leadership, and political participation could be profound. See esp. Kenneth J. Winkle, *The Politics of Community: Migration and Politics in Antebellum Ohio* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Historians of communities, of course, address this problem as well. For example, Doyle, "Social Theory and New Communities," and *The Social Order of a Frontier Community*; Alcorn, "Leadership and Stability."

essentially intimate and cooperative.⁵ Nowhere was this more evident than in politics. Voters consistently rejected party guidance in favor of candidates from their own neighborhood, the principal organizing unit of local government. Finally, and subject of the following chapter, this social structure engendered a hierarchical set of relationships among white men, one that the political culture both reflected and reinforced. Politics lent stability to this neighborhood community and helped the local gentry transmit their status from one generation to the next.

*

Although in most political conflict--at the county and local levels--voters rejected parties, the formative power of community was evident on partisan association. Small rural precincts demonstrated this trend most clearly. In the absence of individual polling data, speculations on the determinants of party choice remain tenuous.⁶ Still, a consistent pattern

⁵ This is Darrett Rutman's summary of colonial town studies. See "Assessing the Little Communities," 167. He also offers a framework for evaluating American communities over time. Taken from sociologists, Rutman's model includes as the key variables "vertical" versus "horizontal" linkages. The former denotes those extra-community connections such as political parties that transcend neighborhood boundaries. "Horizontal" linkages are those of neighbors or extended kin that remain within the locality. See "Assessing the Little Communities," 176-178 and "The Social Web: A Prospectus for the Study of the Early American Community," in William L. O'Neill, ed., *Insights and Parallels: Problems and Issues of American Social History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1973): 57-88. Also Gerald D. Suttles, *The Social Construction of Communities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972). Suttles reviews some of the literature on the theory of communities and argues for the critical role of "territoriality," including the concept of vertical and horizontal linkages, in the "human construction" of "natural communities." See also Roland L. Warren, *The Community in America* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1963).

⁶ This was a problem addressed by the "new political historians" of the 1960s and 1970s. They examined seriously for the first time "who voted for whom," inferring

is unmistakable: precincts tended to remain loyal to one party or the other. In addition to those cases cited in the previous chapter, others included the Whig strongholds of Black Hawk, Greenwood, and LeFlore in Carroll County. Voters at Lowndesville and Swearingen's, in Lowndes County, registered consistent support for Democrats between 1843 and 1853. In Madison County, the Whigs carried Sharon, Battle Spring, and Beatie's Bluff by nearly identical margins between 1845 and 1849. The Democrats, contrarily, won Madisonville, 28-22 and 29-21 over the same period. The most rural precinct in Hinds county, Sturges's Store, backed Whig candidates between 1844 and 1853 with remarkable

individual motivation from aggregate voting returns. For example see Michael F. Holt, *Forging a Majority: The Formation of the Republican Party in Pittsburgh* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969); Paul J. Kleppner, *The Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics, 1850-1900* (New York: Free Press, 1970); and Ronald P. Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827-1861* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971). Two summaries of this literature are Formisano, "Toward a Reorientation of Jacksonian Politics: A Review of the Literature, 1959-1975," *Journal of American History* 63 (June 1976) and "The New Political History," *International Journal of Social Education* 1 (1986): 5-21.

Since the 1980s historians have employed more sophisticated quantitative methodology to infer individual voter behavior, particularly "ecological regression." See William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) (and the discussion in chapter four). But most promising has been the exploitation of individual-level voting data, discovered in a number of areas by historians willing to dig through unused archives. These "poll books" recorded the choices of actual voters, in the days before secret ballots. See Paul F. Bourke and Donald A. DeBats, "Identifiability of Voting in Nineteenth-Century America: Toward a Comparison of Britain and the United States Before the Secret Ballot," *Perspectives in American History* 11 (1977): 259-88 and "Individuals and Aggregates: A Note on Historical Data and Assumptions," *Social Science History* 4 (1980): 229-50. Bourke and DeBats have recently published a further study using poll books, *Washington County: Politics and Community in Antebellum America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995). See also Winkle, *The Politics of Community*, and Daniel Crofts, *Old Southampton: Politics and Society in a Virginia County 1834-1869* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1992).

stability: 51-9, 51-17, 40-10, 42-19, and 76-29. Likewise did Willow Spring's voters, in Claiborne county's smallest precinct, favor the Democrats from 1843 to 1853: 30-14, 30-10, 18-7, 21-17, and 14-9. The town precincts of Carrollton, Columbus, Raymond and Port Gibson exhibited greater instability. With more men moving in and out, it was increasingly difficult for the community to socialize them into existing partisan alignments.

These conclusions echo those of other students of southern voting behavior. In Alabama, Mills Thornton found that "[o]ver the years the residents of the beats adopted one or the other party and stayed with it, largely because of the activities of the beat partisans, who zealously reinforced the ideological inertia of the mass of voters." He further contended that "beats very rarely deviated from their usual voting patterns." Likewise Thomas Jeffrey, looking at antebellum North Carolina, traced partisanship to early social divisions, as far back as the colonial period. These "core versus periphery" alignments maintained their continuity throughout the antebellum period.⁷ Jeffrey's analysis reinforced the conclusions of Robert Kenzer, who studied Orange County, North Carolina. "Party affiliation had become an inheritance bestowed upon young men," he concluded, "who received the traditional party orientation of their rural neighborhood." Party leaders keyed all activities to neighborhoods, where "affiliations were both formed

⁷ J. Mills Thornton, III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 159. Thornton emphasizes ideology and partisan commitment, with different conclusions than I regarding the acceptance of parties (see also Chapter Three). Thomas E. Jeffrey, *State Parties and National Politics: North Carolina, 1815-1861* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 66, 314, and *passim*.

and sustained."⁸ Partisanship for most voters, then, typically began in pre-existing local loyalties, and had little to do with ideology, or in the South, ethnic or religious conflict.⁹

The origins of these partisan divisions often lay in patterns of settlement or issues raised during county formation, often placement of the county courthouse. When parties

⁸ Robert C. Kenzer, *Kinship and Neighborhood in a Southern Community: Orange County, North Carolina, 1849-1881* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 3, 52. Christopher Morris, "Town and Country in the Old South: Vicksburg and Warren County, Mississippi, 1770-1860," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Florida, 1991, found party divisions came from "idiosyncratic" neighborhood loyalties formed during the settlement period. See particularly 364-373. M. Philip Lucas also emphasizes the local orientation of Mississippi's politics, although making different conclusions about party development. "Beyond McCormick and Miles: The Pre-Partisan Political Culture of Mississippi," *Journal of Mississippi History*, 44 (Nov. 1982): 329-348. Partisanship rooted in neighborhoods was not only a Southern phenomenon. See Ronald P. Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1790s-1840s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Paul F. Bourke and Donald A. DeBats, "The Structure of Political Involvement in the Nineteenth Century: A Frontier Case," *Perspectives in American History* New Series, 3 (1987): 207-238. Another study of Northern ethnic voters that emphasizes the powerful role of community in shaping political identity, although mostly in the post-bellum period, is Kathleen Neils Conzen, "German-Americans and Ethnic Political Culture: Stearns County, Minnesota, 1855-1915," Paper presented at the Symposium on "America seen from the outside: Topics, models, and achievements of American Studies in the Federal Republic of Germany," Dec. 1-4, 1988.

⁹ The new political historians focused principally on northern voting behavior and concluded, in general, that partisan divisions conformed to patterns of ethnic and religious cleavages, reinforced by neighborhood settlement patterns and corresponding social institutions. See, for example, Formisano, *Birth of Mass Political Parties*; Holt, *Forging a Majority*; Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*. More recent work with poll books has tended to agree with those studies that used aggregate data--voting patterns came from community networks of friends and neighbors. Formisano summarized these findings: "They have emphasized the importance of local neighborhood voting blocs, which tended to be amalgams of kinship, proximate residence, a common church, and other shared networks of social and economic life" ("The New Political History," 15). See also Harry L. Watson, *Jacksonian Politics and Community Conflict: The Emergence of the Second American Party System in Cumberland County, North Carolina* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1981).

became more important, voters translated these county-level divisions to state and even national contests. Christopher Morris found this ideal held true in Warren County, Mississippi, where location of the courthouse engendered a North-South split between Milldale and Warrenton. Voters transferred these patterns to state and national elections when parties became more important during the 1840s.¹⁰ Thornton also points out the importance of "beat activists" in maintaining the partisan alignment of neighborhoods over time, although, contrary to Kenzer and Morris, he emphasizes the impact of ideology rather than community tradition. Jeffrey argues that ethnocultural divisions were central to emerging political factions during the colonial period, which were reinforced by early national-period issues, particularly the "caucus" candidacy of William Crawford in 1824. Whatever their source, however, Jeffrey maintains that these loyalties remained fixed and communities extended them to Whig-Democratic contests.¹¹

Despite the importance of community context, some of Mississippi's Whigs and Democrats apparently reacted to other issues. Whigs predominated in the Mississippi River delta, an area of plantation agriculture.¹² The basis of this loyalty, however, remains

¹⁰ Morris, "Town and Country," 359-61 and 364. Historians of the "First Party System" likewise noted that early partisan differences often came from "highly local" rivalries "within towns and cities, counties and states." Alfred F. Young, *The Democratic Republicans of New York: The Origins, 1763-1797* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 570, quoted in Formisano, "Deferential-Participant Politics," 476. See also Paul Goodman, *The Democratic Republicans of Massachusetts: Politics in a Young Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964).

¹¹ Jeffrey, *State Parties*, 25-30.

¹² John Edmond Gonzales, "Flush Times, Depression, War, and Compromise," in *A History of Mississippi*, Vol. I, ed. Richard Aubrey McLemore (Hattiesburg, MS:

unclear. Most farmers in Mississippi were oriented toward the market and virtually no one opposed internal improvements.¹³ Throughout the antebellum period, in fact, voters consistently supported direct taxation to fund railroad investment. Disputes hinged not on the desirability of railroads, but on what route they would take. Banks were a dead issue in Mississippi after the Panic of 1837 and prolonged depression during the next decade, which forever condemned them as unsafe.¹⁴ In short, the economic issues that supposedly divided southern Whigs and Democrats had little relevance in antebellum Mississippi. Furthermore, one study of active partisans revealed no difference in wealth between the two parties, underscoring the insignificance of socioeconomic characteristics.¹⁵

University and College Press of Mississippi, 1973); Ray Skates, *Mississippi: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979); Percy Lee Rainwater, *Mississippi: Storm-Center of Secession 1856-1861* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1938). This interpretation, in general, holds that southern Whigs were the party of economic nationalism and had more connections to a national or even international market. Thus the party fared best in plantation belts and towns. Democrats were more "localistic" and opposed banks, federally funded internal improvements and a protective tariff. The classic statement of this position was Thomas Alexander, et. al., "The Basis of Alabama's Antebellum Two-Party System," *Alabama Review* 19 (Oct. 1966): 243-276. See also the discussion in Chapter 4.

¹³ On the market orientation of Mississippi farmers see Bradley Bond, "A Southern Social Ethic: Political Economy in the nineteenth-century South. Mississippi, 1840-1910," Ph. D. Dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1993.

¹⁴ On Mississippi voters, the 1840s depression and failure of banking, see Edwin Arthur Miles, *Jacksonian Democracy in Mississippi* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960); and Dale R. Prentiss, "Economic Progress and Social Dissent in Michigan and Mississippi, 1837-1860," Ph. D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 1990.

¹⁵ David N. Young, "The Mississippi Whigs, 1834-1860," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Alabama, 1968. Young calculated the real property owned among party activists. Democrats averaged \$4,202 and Whigs \$4,203 (77-82).

Many party leaders, as Thornton and Kenzer demonstrated, organized their events in rural neighborhoods. Mississippi was no exception. Formal organization began with beat, or precinct meetings where men chose delegates for county and then in turn, district and state conventions. Editors typically touted party candidates as "proposed by the people in their neighborhood assemblies." More important than these small groups of activists, however, were the social events such as debates and barbecues that often brought out the whole family.¹⁶ Organizers almost invariably made special appeals "to the Ladies." Women and children formed a large part of these gatherings, making them inclusive community functions.¹⁷ The focus, as always, was on the neighborhood. "The Barbecues at Auburn, Utica and Cayuga were highly creditable to the citizens of those neighborhoods," wrote one editor. "The attendance was large at each place--particularly on the part of the ladies." The residents of Spring Ridge invited local candidates to a barbecue during the 1851 campaign. "Ample arrangements," they assured residents, "will

¹⁶ Party enthusiasts often complained of the meager turnout in beat and county conventions. Democrat Wiley P. Harris explained that the "system of conventions or caucus system very often exposes the fact that the people are indifferent" to party organizations. "Autobiography," in Dunbar Rowland, ed., *Courts, Judges, and Lawyers of Mississippi, 1798-1935*, Volume I (Jackson, MS: Printed for the State Department of Archives and History and the Mississippi Historical Society, 1935), 301.

¹⁷ On women and children at party functions, see esp. Elizabeth Varon, "Tippecanoe and the Ladies, Too: White Women and Party Politics in Antebellum Virginia," *Journal of American History* 82 (Sept. 1995): 494-521; and Jayne Crumpler DeFiore, "COME, and Bring the Ladies: Tennessee Women and the Politics of Opportunity during the Presidential Campaigns of 1840 and 1844," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 51 (Winter 1992).

by made by the neighborhood to supply a good dinner to all who may be pleased to attend."¹⁸

These party organizers recognized the need to include the entire community in political functions. By offering the allure of women, they hoped to entice men, as potential voters, to hear their party's message. Party leaders also knew that this strategy was particularly important for young men, more likely to be unmarried, first-time voters, and politically uncommitted. Underscoring the importance of attracting young people to these functions, one Democrat recounted the "Bran Dance at Quitman Springs" for his local newspaper. "At the usual hour, a very large crowd," he said, composed of "candidates for office and candidates for matrimony, were congregated under the spacious arbor, anxiously awaiting the first notes of the soul-stirring violin."¹⁹ Thus, rallies ostensibly designed to inform the party faithful became equally an excuse to mingle with the opposite sex or visit family friends. In either case, women provided a central part of the day's activities.

The emphasis placed on dinner and entertainment, of course, underlined the essentially social nature of party events. "For most of the electorate," argues Kenzer, "the campaign was more a social activity than an enlightening lesson in political doctrine."²⁰

¹⁸ *Hinds County Gazette*, July 20, 1853; Aug. 21, 1851; June 19, 1851.

¹⁹ *The Democratic Banner*, Aug. 5, 1853.

²⁰ Kenzer, *Kinship and Neighborhood*, 58. See also Daniel Dupre, "Barbecues and Pledges: Electioneering and the Rise of Democratic Politics in Antebellum Alabama," *Journal of Southern History*, LX (Aug. 1994): 479-512.

One contemporary Mississippian, Joseph B. Cobb, lampooned party "debates" in his satirical account of "A Campaign Barbecue in the Southwest." In this fictional meeting, only three of the 199 guests had not already committed to one party. Cobb claimed that uncommitted voters steadfastly avoided such rallies to escape pushy activists and stay clear of worthless blather. Thus, the meeting was an exercise in generating enthusiasm, drinking and eating. "Calm, dispassionate argument, sound reason, and a candid exposition of the principles which separated the two parties, were, it was distinctly understood, to be totally expurgated and eschewed." After some meaningless speeches, "a general dash was instantly made for the tables." After the ladies began, "each voter . . . fell greedily to work. Roasted beef, and mutton saddles, and greasy, barbecued shoats, and venison haunches, and whole armies of minor victims were indiscriminately assaulted and unceremoniously dispatched." The "smack of lips and more appalling crash of teeth" could be heard throughout the picnic grounds.²¹ While more esoteric questions motivated a small number of party leaders, neighborhood barbecues threw into clear relief the non-ideological, issueless party politics that most Mississippians knew.

Local communities thus formed the partisan outlook for the mass of voters. When Jefferson J. Birdsong, a planter in Hinds County recorded election day 1856, he

²¹ Joseph Beckham Cobb, *Mississippi Scenes: or, Sketches of Southern and Western life and adventure, humorous, satirical, and descriptive, including the legend of Black Creek* (Philadelphia: A. Hart, 1851), 152-153. Another work that highlights the social functions of party politics, as well as the non-ideological orientation of most voters, is Paula Baker, "The Culture of Politics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Community and Political Behavior in Rural New York," *Journal of Social History* 89 (June 1984), 167-193.

encapsulated this perspective. That Millard Fillmore carried Hinds County, or even that James Buchanan would be President of the United States apparently held little interest. Rather, he recorded in his diary only that "Brownsville [his home precinct] have [sic] given Fillmore [sic] 56 majority." Furthermore, he expressed greater interest in local magistrate Henry M. White's election to the Board of Police. Rural newspapers such as *The Fort Adams Item* typically recorded only the votes of its home precinct--in this case the boxes at Fort Adams and Pinckneyville--but ignored state or even county-wide totals.²² Thus, even in state and national contests, voters remained tied to their neighborhoods. Most citizens had more contact with county government than either state or federal authority, which naturally focused even greater attention on these local elections.²³

The previous chapter presented evidence that demonstrated the insignificance of parties in county and local elections. While there is little individual polling data from antebellum Mississippi, a number of sources indicate the driving force of residence in local contests. Elections for county officers, which frequently included multiple candidates, showed that each man typically enjoyed overwhelming support from the voters in and near his home precinct. In Marshall County's 1858 elections, for instance, five men ran for tax assessor. Winner Thomas H. Smith received sixty-eight of the seventy-seven votes cast in adjacent precincts Tallaloosa and Red Bank. Similarly, 152 of the 164 voters in

²² Jefferson J. Birdsong Diary, Nov. 4, 1856 (MDAH). *The Fort Adams Item*, Nov. 12, 1853 and Nov. 10, 1855.

²³ This perspective on governmental authority likewise conforms to an "eighteenth-century" model. See Rutman, "Assessing the Little Communities," and Kenzer, *Kinship and Neighborhood*.

Cornersville and Belldazzle--the southeast corner of Marshall county--went for local resident B. R. Long. The other three candidates failed to register such impressive "banner" precincts, although each received his highest total near home. The three-way race for surveyor that year proved equally revealing. William J. B. Rudery, the eventual victor, gathered 112 of 115 votes at Snow Creek, thirty-one of thirty-seven at Hudsonville, 162 of 183 at Waterford, 117 of 118 at Cornersville, and all eighty-six tallies in Belldazzle. He also earned a large majority in Holly Springs, the county seat and largest town. In short, he won every precinct in east Marshall county. J. C. Babb, who finished second, dominated the northwest corner of the county. He got 149 of 160 votes at Byhalia and sixty-three of sixty-five at Oak Grove.²⁴ Finally, J. G. Wilson, who finished a fairly distant third with only 268 votes, nevertheless enjoyed over eighty percent in his home of Chullahoma--the largest precinct in southwest Marshall. The three candidates, in other words, divided the county into three (unequal) regions, each man with overwhelming support in one.²⁵

²⁴ He also got twenty-five of twenty-seven at Tyre, which I was unable to locate.

²⁵ Two years later Marshall's voters likewise supported their neighborhood candidates. The races for tax assessor and treasurer, in particular, revealed this pattern. Morris, "Town and Country," found the same result in Warren county, where "neighborhood variation remained the salient feature of local elections throughout the antebellum years" (358). Harry Watson also argued for greater community cohesiveness in southern politics. See "Conflict and collaboration: yeomen, slaveholders, and politics in the antebellum South," *Social History* 10 (Oct. 1985), 273-298. "[I]t appears that southern communities were far more likely to be homogeneous in their political behavior than their northern counterparts" (284).

Counties with significant towns sometimes revealed a town and country split among the voters. In Hinds county the residents of Jackson and Raymond contended for leadership throughout the antebellum period. Raymond enjoyed the county courthouse, but Jackson, of course, housed the state capital and inevitably overtook its nearby rival. Elections for county officers often pitted Jacksonians against men from other communities. Emphasizing the importance of one's home neighborhood, the Raymond newspaper typically included it when announcing county candidates. In 1845, for instance, editor George W. Harper announced the Whig nominees for legislature as "D. S. Jennings of Jackson; A. R. Green of Newtown; Henry S. Pope of Raymond; and Charles S. Spann of Brownsville."²⁶ In this case the editor tried to promote party harmony: the declaration indicated he was alert to potential dissatisfaction if the several neighborhoods were not represented. The 1860 three-way contest for probate court clerk underscored the antagonism between Jackson and the rest of Hinds county. Samuel Donnell, who finished last with 453 votes, received 364 of 444 in Jackson itself. Yet, he got only ten of 288 votes in Raymond and none in Brownsville, Cayuga, or Burnett's Wells. Merchant B. F. Edwards and eventual winner Samuel Thigpen split the Raymond vote, but Thigpen won big majorities in the southeast precincts of Byram and Terry, and a large share in nearby Auburn. Edwards had more consistent support throughout the county, but a disappointing 46.7 percent plurality at his home cost him the election by just six votes.

²⁶ Sept. 10, 1845.

These cases illustrated the importance of residence in elections for county officers. In other cases, of course, the returns are not as informative. A complex network of relatives and friends contributed to any candidate's success. An apparently unaccountable victory may have resulted from an influential uncle or fellow church member. One study of the counties surrounding Augusta, Georgia uncovered some of the details of these relationships. J. William Harris recounted the machinations of candidate David C. Barrow, who added ties of extended kinship and church membership to his neighborhood base. Advice from his more experienced brother-in-law prompted Barrow to "appear daily at the public centres" and make contacts. McKinley thought Barrow's prominent Methodism would net him some sympathetic votes among fellow church members. He likewise urged the candidate to give "immediate attention" to Archer Griffith, an old party acquaintance. Finally, McKinley pushed Barrow to cultivate five or six of the district's leading men, since securing them and their friends would probably be decisive.²⁷

Mississippian Reuben Davis likewise related the potentially decisive advantage of friends and neighbors. In his first campaign for public office, Davis found he had a tough opponent in Thomas J. Word of Pontotoc county. Word was older, better known and more established. Besides, as one local told young Davis, his opponent was "a good fellow, tells a capital story, and plays the fiddle." In addition to these seemingly unbeatable qualities,

²⁷ J. William Harris, *Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society: White Liberty and Black Slavery in Augusta's Hinterlands* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1985), 94-95. He concluded that political "success depended on a network of personal ties based on face-to-face contact" (95). Harris unfortunately lacked any local election returns from his district. Morris, "Town and Country," similarly concluded that patriarchs saw county politics as an extended neighborhood (356).

he was handsome and a polished speaker. Davis soon found allies of his own, however. He met an old family friend, Col. William L. Duncan who instantly pledged his friends and family from throughout Tippah county. Davis, son of Baptist preacher John Davis, likewise impressed a local Methodist minister. The reverend appreciated Davis's religious upbringing and particularly favored Mrs. Davis, a "most devoted Methodist." "The next morning there was a large crowd at [the] tavern," Davis remembered, "most of them members of his church." The reverend "introduced me to them, dwelling upon the fact that I had married an enthusiastic Methodist." Davis also wisely befriended the tavern keeper, who afterwards "worked for me manfully until the election." After another speech, one listener ascertained that he had known Davis' father and immediately pledged his vote and those of his family, plus as many of his fellow church members as he could muster. Davis concluded "[i]t seemed that I was to learn on that occasion how large a part family friendship can play in such cases."²⁸

Comments from other contemporaries likewise showed that county politics were essentially based on neighborhood loyalties. As Reuben Davis discovered, success often depended on how widely acquainted one was. When Samuel T. King ran for Hinds county treasurer in 1851, he emphasized his long residence in the area and assumed that was all the voters needed to hear. "I have lived more than twenty years in Hinds County, and I

²⁸ Reuben Davis, *Recollections of Mississippi and Mississippians* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, The Riverside Press, 1890), 66-70. On the varying influences affecting individual voter choice, including church membership, see Robert Huckfeldt, Eric Plutzer, and John Sprague, "Alternative Contexts of Political Behavior: Churches, Neighborhoods, and Individuals," *Journal of Politics* 55 (May 1993), 365-381.

suppose my character and qualifications are known to most of you." King calculated that his good reputation and personal friendships would carry him into office.²⁹ In 1855 John B. Hughes ran for tax assessor of Hinds County. When he received a small vote at his home precinct of Cayuga, friends and neighbors sent a public letter to the *Hinds County Gazette* explaining why. The county American party, they said, had decided to support another man for the office (in a rare case of partisanship at this level) and Hughes had not enough time to withdraw his name. "This accounts for the small number of votes cast for him here at home," wrote his friends, "and however we may regret the necessity thus imposed upon us, we console ourselves" that a fellow Know Nothing was elected.³⁰ These correspondents worried that Hughes looked unpopular "here at home"--that his friends and neighbors had rebuked, and thus dishonored him. In similar manner did candidate Peter G. Johnston defend himself against charges of business fraud. He immediately sought validation of his good conduct among neighbors and friends. A published letter, signed by some of the neighborhood's leading citizens, tried to put Johnston back on track. "We, the undersigned, citizens of Cayuga and vicinity," they began, "take pleasure in stating that we live in a neighborhood as moral as any in Hinds county, so far as we know--and that no one stands fairer in it than Mr. P. G. Johnston." They concluded that his character was "above reproach."³¹

²⁹ *Flag of the Union*, Nov. 7, 1851.

³⁰ Nov. 28, 1855. See also *The Commonwealth*, June 23, 1855.

³¹ *Hinds County Gazette*, Oct. 19, 1853.

Frustrated partisan editors likewise testified to the overriding importance of face-to-face relationships. "You have a full democratic ticket for the county [representatives], composed of men every way capable and faithful," admonished one editor, "a ticket fairly got up, without caucusing or secret management." He pleaded with the voters to support their party: "Your vote, in fact, is not your own to be determined by the whim of the moment *or the dictates of personal friendship*." Another contemporary explained why neighborhood ties always precluded the possibility of a nominating convention for local offices: "[D]o you not suppose that every man in this county has some particular man that he desires to support for some office."³² Local elections afforded Mississippians the luxury of backing men they knew personally--while they had to rely on the "Right of Instruction" to keep party hacks in line, they could trust, or believed they could trust their friends, neighbors, and kinfolk. Voters were only too happy to dispense with parties when possible. "The question among us should be," summarized one writer, "is the aspirant for the office of Sheriff, Clerk, &c. capable, faithful and honest?" This question could only be answered, responded another, when "a majority of the voters have form[ed] some

³² *Columbus Democrat*, Nov. 3, 1849; *Ripley Advertiser*, Mar. 31, 1858. Harris, *Plain Folk and Gentry*, reached similar a conclusion: "County-level affairs seem to have had little direct connection with political parties" (112).

[personal] acquaintance with him."³³ The ultimate imperative of these neighborhood associations became most evident in elections for precinct officers.

In Mississippi voters chose five members to each county "Board of Police." This body exercised wide legislative authority over issues such as taxation, roadways, bridges, and liquor licenses. In addition, each police district normally chose two justices of the peace and two constables. The former enjoyed some limited judicial authority, civil cases involving less than fifty dollars, and generally served to "keep the peace" within his district. Constables lacked judicial authority but helped the sheriff when needed. Unlike many states, Mississippi elected all of these officers, making it an ideal window to the world of local politics. Voting returns rarely included precinct totals and even less often *sub*-precinct returns. But, when a BOP or JOP district included two or three poll boxes, and when the returning officer took the time to record separate totals, the preeminence of neighborhood became undeniably clear.

In Amite County, police district number four included Smith's and Spurlock's precincts. The voters chose farmer Eli S. Westbrook and teacher Reiley Corcoran over incumbent John C. Wilson for JOP in 1855. Westbrook and Corcoran received all of their votes at Smith's box. In losing, Wilson got all of the twenty-six tallies at Spurlock's box.

³³ *Ripley Advertiser*, Mar. 24, 1858. The second correspondent was actually arguing for a county nominating convention because he argued that no one could afford the time and money to canvass the entire county and therefore make such a personal acquaintance with the voters unless he was assured of at least a reasonable chance of success. In other words, those with the best personal connections would continue to win election after election unless the parties made nominations and gave voters some means of judging those candidates less favored with a large family or long residence in the area.

In the election for constable, A. W. Westbrook bested three rivals, thanks to his twenty-seven votes in Smith's box. Mark Tarver lost, despite recording all of the nineteen votes given at Spurlock's (Table 5-1). In police district two the situation was the same: voters at Thickwoods supported their neighbors, and those around Toler's box did likewise. For the BOP, Moses Jackson defeated L. G. Gayle, thirty-seven to twenty-nine. Gayle carried Thickwoods, but Jackson got all eighteen votes at Toler's box, which put him over the top. For JOP, Francis H. Hitchcock beat a trio of opponents, receiving all of his nineteen votes at Thickwoods. One of the defeated, Archibald Cain, got every vote cast at Toler's (Table 5-2).

The same year voters in Carroll County demonstrated similar loyalty to their neighbors. Local planter William McD Martin won election to the BOP in district one, encompassing Greenwood, Sidon, and Black Hawk (the extreme southwest) because he received 113 of 120 votes in Black Hawk and eighty percent at Sidon. His opponent Patrick H. Brown enjoyed unanimous support in Greenwood. John W. McRae and Simon T. Lane, who both lived near Black Hawk, were chosen JOPs, thanks to overwhelming favor at their home precinct and in adjacent Sidon. Greenwood merchant Jesse C. Wood received nearly unanimous support from his customers, but got no votes in Sidon or Black Hawk. In the election for constable, voters around Greenwood decided not to participate at all--both candidates, James M. Fansher and Richard A. Jones lived in Black Hawk beat (Table 5-3). The results from district two were similar. All of the three candidates for constable lived in the Smith's Mills beat, and thus no one from Point LeFlore or Jefferson cast any votes in that contest (Table 5-4).

These and other instances revealed the overwhelming power of residence in determining the outcome of local elections (see Tables 5-5, 5-6, and 5-7). The often unanimous support gathered at one's home precinct characteristically provided the margin for victory. Any candidate who failed to get that decisive majority from his neighbors could expect to lose. Some historians have suggested that a growing crisis in the slave-based economy in the middle and late 1850s (increasingly limited supplies of good land and slaves, and thus access to the planter ideal) undermined the cohesiveness of Southern communities and fostered class and generational tension.³⁴ Election returns from Mississippi provided little indication of this. On the contrary, the power of community and neighborhood consensus seemed intact up to secession. Elections for county and local officers in 1860 showed the same patterns that prevailed throughout the late 1840s and 1850s (Table 5-7, for example). In Bolivar County, the 1860 race for county treasurer typified the enduring strength of neighborhood togetherness. James McCracken, who lived near the polling precinct at Concordia, won a majority there, and forty-eight of fifty votes at nearby Australia (northern Bolivar). William L. Stewart, who finished second, got no votes in Australia and less than ten percent in Concordia. Stewart, who ran a hotel in Prentiss, did receive thirty-eight of forty-three votes in his hometown as well as a large majority in nearby Bolivar (southern Bolivar). Third-place William W. Arnold, also from Concordia, did most well at home, but failed to carry any precinct decisively. The three

³⁴ William L. Barney, "Towards the Civil War: The Dynamics of Change in a Black Belt County," in Orville Vernon Burton and Robert C. McMath, Jr., eds., *Class, Conflict, and Consensus: Antebellum Southern Community Studies* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982): 146-172. See also the discussion in the Introduction.

men split the votes given at Beulah, which lay in between the opponents's home neighborhoods (Table 5-8). After years of economic and demographic change, these voters in Bolivar County, like others from across Mississippi still rallied to support their neighborhood candidates, just as they had done for the previous twenty years.

*

Given the continued strength of neighborhood loyalties and intracounty regionalism, contentious county issues testified further to the rich diversity of local politics. National issues, which dominated the pages of state party organs and private correspondence among party politicians (sources favored by historians), often took a back seat to more immediate concerns in the pages of regional newspapers. Whig or Democrat meant nothing to most voters when the state legislature moved the county seat. When the Board of Police voted twenty thousand additional tax dollars for a bridge on the other end of the county, national parties seemed unimportant. A complex interplay of local issues and personal relationships defined county politics, with neighborhood loyalty providing the guiding force. Above all, recognizing the importance and divisiveness of such concerns highlights the confusion and difficulty in trying to link national parties and issues to grass roots political behavior.

The Boards of Police, in charge of raising and spending county funds, naturally attracted the attention of citizens and local editors. Voters registered their concern for these local offices with election day turnout that typically surpassed sixty percent.³⁵ Selection to

³⁵ Absolute turnout often fell below that for state and national contests because of the several BOP elections that typically went uncontested each year. These are discussed

the Board meant status and influence, contests often brought out several candidates and results indicated that these positions were hotly disputed. Local editors likewise commented on Board activities. George W. Harper of the *Hinds County Gazette* expressed a general sense of confidence in the newly elected Board of 1853 but did have one complaint. The people, he said, felt that the proceedings of the Board were too secretive. He urged new members to be more diligent in making its actions public knowledge. "We do not see the propriety or policy of the Board suppressing its proceedings," he concluded. His request had some effect--two years later he reported each Board member's vote on a controversial new tax to replace the Hinds county courthouse.³⁶ With annual county tax rates that usually exceeded that of state levies, citizens were understandably curious about what the Board did with all that money. In Jefferson county, the Fayette newspaper printed notices from the Board announcing when they would fix future tax rates, allowing county residents to attend the meeting and offer their opinions, and objections.³⁷

Some of the typical disputes that engulfed Boards of Police became evident in the hostility of editor Owen Van Vactor towards the council in his home Madison County. Van Vactor, who operated *The Commonwealth* in Canton, kept up a running criticism of the Board's tax program and schemes for county improvements. "Were we to dive into the records of the Police Court, and expose acts reeking with corruption and manifold

in the following chapter.

³⁶ *Hinds County Gazette*, Nov. 23, 1853; March 14, 1855.

³⁷ *Fayette Watch-Tower*, July 11, 1856, for example.

instances of foul favoritism," the editor speculated, "we would soon have a nest of hornets about our head." When the Board contracted to redesign the courthouse, adding a \$5,000 dome that threatened to collapse the building, taxpayers had to come up with another 800 dollars to take it down. Van Vactor lampooned the Board's "wisdom," but admitted that several of his "advisors" remained divided over the project.³⁸ In the county elections of 1858 Van Vactor lent his support to John T. Semmes as a candidate to the Board in District Four. "Let such men as Semmes be put in office and we predict a wholesome revolution."³⁹ Editors and private citizens supported Board projects and stirred up enthusiasm among their fellow taxpayers. George Harper urged the Hinds County Board to invest 100,000 tax dollars to finance the Jackson and New Orleans Railroad, a new courthouse, and a bridge over the Big Black River. He further suggested that they combine the measures into one bill, thus placating more citizens with "something for everyone."⁴⁰

One particular series of public letters and editorials from Jefferson County illustrated the prominence afforded local issues. This debate further demonstrated the overriding importance of neighborhood and intracounty regionalism. The controversy

³⁸ *The Commonwealth*, March 13, 1858; Dec. 12, 1857. This debate had a partisan component to it. Van Vactor, a Democrat, opposed the Board's president, Nathan B. Whitehead, a Know Nothing. Furthermore, Canton's Know-Nothing newspaper, *The American Citizen*, offered support for the courthouse dome. Although, as noted, Van Vactor admitted that his own Democratic friends remained divided over the issue. The partisan component to this episode in local politics was a result of the peculiar Know-Nothing era, discussed in chapter seven, and was not evident in county disputes before that time.

³⁹ *The Commonwealth*, March 20, 1858.

⁴⁰ *Hinds County Gazette*, Apr. 18, 1855.

began when the Board of Police contracted the firm of Weldons, in the Summer of 1857, to build a new bridge over Cole's Creek at Dobyn's Ford. Critics complained that the Board lacked authority to make such an agreement without approval from the voters, provoking a debate over the nature of county government and the mutual responsibilities of citizen and representative. A correspondent of the *Fayette Watch-Tower* defended the court, noting that Policemen had every legal right to do what they thought best for the county.⁴¹ The bridge opponents's next strategy was to incite regionalism and resentment over the increased taxes each citizen would owe for an expensive structure (\$28,000) that most would never use. Letters from "Humble Citizen" and "Public Spirit" defended the Board's plan and appealed to county pride: Jefferson's tax burden was light when compared to surrounding counties, and they had fallen behind some neighbors' impressive new bridges.⁴² Furthermore, planners had sited the bridge for a mail route, which would benefit all county residents.

The initial critic, writing under "The Same," continued to attack the bridge as a pet project of one district. Board members, he charged, voted merely out of local

⁴¹ Aug. 28, 1857. In 1855 Mississippi changed its election procedure so that county and local officers would be elected in even-numbered years, separately from state officers (see chapter 7). The immediate effect was to prolong the tenure of those officials elected in 1855, who should have been up for reelection in 1857, but now stayed on until 1858. Some of the critics of the Jefferson county bridge claimed that because this Board was essentially a "lame duck" and only still in office thanks to a legal change, they should have to submit this particular project for voter approval. See in particular the letter from "One of Them," Feb. 26, 1858. On the debate regarding the relationship between voter and elected official see "Public Spirit" in the *Jefferson Journal*, March 5, 1858.

⁴² *Jefferson Journal*, Nov. 13 and 20, 1857. Letters from "High and Low," on Nov. 20 and Dec. 4 sounded similar backing for the project.

considerations and ignored the good of the county. Two more letters responded and claimed that their representatives did rise above district loyalties and urged citizens again to take pride in their county's public works.⁴³ By February, 1858 the debate had turned into a discussion of county improvements in general, and a series of acrimonious exchanges between residents of the various precincts. Opponents continued to call the Board's action illegal without voter approval. One finally called for the "bridge question," by which he meant all taxpayer-funded public works, to be "a test for the members of our Board of Police at the next and at all subsequent elections."⁴⁴ When residents in Church Hill precinct (in southwest Jefferson), and later Maryland settlement, petitioned the Board to stop the bridge, letters from the north and east rebuked them.

Church Hill, a wealthy district near the Mississippi River, had enjoyed substantial county patronage in the past. "Tax Payer" noted that the area's "caving banks, high hills, deep ravines and crumbling soil, [that] will impose a continued expense upon the treasury" for years to come. Furthermore, its "numerous bridges, the increasing necessity for them, and the large sums, we, living in other districts have been paying out for many years to facilitate your convenience," showed their opposition to be utterly selfish and localism of the worst kind, devoid of any sense of public duty. "Individual enterprise has not built the bridges in the South-western part of the county," complained another writer. "The county treasury thus afforded the capital, and the northeastern part has contributed its share, . .

⁴³ *Jefferson Journal*, Dec. 18 and 25, 1857; Jan. 1, 8, and 15, 1858.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Jan. 29, Feb. 5, 1858.

. and now on the principle of reciprocity, [we] demand reciprocal benefits."⁴⁵ The complaints, in other words, had little to do with taxes or a generalized opposition to internal improvements. Rather, those in northeast Jefferson simply resented the localism of Church Hill and other precincts, who had benefitted in the past but now failed to act fairly toward other neighborhoods.

"Public Spirit" tried once more to get Jeffersonians to overcome the regionalism that divided county voters. Those who were "so grounded in selfish motives [and] sectional prejudices, that they can see no public good in anything except that which contributes to their own personal benefit" reflected only a lack of training and education in civic virtue. A product of Mississippi's political culture, this writer labeled his opponents "demagogues, contemptible wise-acres of the land, who corrupt the genial flow of patriotism."⁴⁶ "Public Spirit" invoked the state's universal language of politics in an attempt to unite his county. The Jefferson county bridge debate underscored the power of regionalism that inherently affected such projects. As in voting for county officers, Mississippians looked to their neighborhoods during times of conflict.

Like the discussion of local improvements in Jefferson, county politics, as outlined in previous chapters, rarely involved parties. The only exception came in contests for the state legislature, where Whigs and Democrats typically made formal nominations. Historians have linked national partisan ideology and issues to local campaigns and

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Feb. 11, 1858. See also the letter of March 12.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, March 5, 1858. The debate went on through March and April and into May.

strategy, and voters often revealed solid party loyalty in races for county representative.⁴⁷ Running for the state legislature as a Whig or Democrat indicated a certain affinity for those parties, but local questions constantly intruded on any neat classification. County issues that typically divided voters regionally by neighborhoods upset established patterns. This uncertainty made partisan identities and linkage to state and national loyalties more than somewhat dubious. These instances underscored again the complex and diverse nature of politics in Mississippi, where ideology and national issues--other than sectionalism--seemed to have little impact.

In Claiborne County, throughout the campaigns of 1851 and 1853, a public schools law divided the two leading newspapers and put popular state representative Joseph Regan, author of the measure, on the defensive. The law called for counties to levy an additional tax to support public schools and authorized funds from the state treasury as a supplement. Any county that declined to levy the tax would be denied the proposed distribution from Jackson. The Democratic newspaper in Port Gibson opposed Regan's plan and urged the Board of Police to forego any tax. Thus, the contemplated schools tax--a measure debated and decided within county politics--affected partisan positions and pressured voters in several different directions.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ See for example Jeffrey, *State Parties and National Politics*; and William J. Cooper, Jr., *The South and the Politics of Slavery, 1828-1856* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1978).

⁴⁸ See, for example, Regan's initial letter defending the law, in *The Herald and Correspondent*, April 12, 1850; and opposition from the *Port Gibson Southern Reveille*, April 28, 1852. In 1853 the *Reveille* literally ceased coverage of anything political except the state senate contest.

In 1857, the confusion in Calhoun and Yallobusha Counties (which composed one senatorial district) showed the futility of attaching national party labels to local partisans. The Democrats nominated Judge Brashear but a faction of the party in Calhoun repudiated him and chose A. M. Reasons, citing the "undemocratic" rules and regulations--an "illegal caucus"--adopted at the first convention. The controversy also involved a courthouse question, further splintering the party. Finally, other Democrats demonstrated against the lack of banking facilities in the area. The settled platform of the state party, of course, had been opposed to chartering any banks since the Panic of 1837 and ensuing depression.⁴⁹ In sum, there were at least three potent local issues that divided Democrats in Calhoun and Yallobusha, each affecting the general election for state representatives.

A prolonged antagonism between Jackson and Raymond upset party alignments in Hinds county throughout the late 1840s and 1850s, chiefly generated by Raymond's monopoly over county jurisprudence. In 1848 Jacksonians tried to move the county seat to their growing city, prompting a series of debates and counter-proposals, including offers from several towns to erect a new courthouse. The dispute soon involved plans for a new county, taking territory from southern Hinds and neighboring Claiborne and Copiah. The courthouse question was again center-stage in 1853, when Dr. David O. Williams, of Clinton, ran for county representative on the "removal" issue. Since only the state

⁴⁹ *Hinds County Gazette*, Sept. 16, 1857.

legislature could authorize relocation of the county seat, control of the county's delegation became paramount.⁵⁰

Thus, rather than state, much less national issues affecting county elections, the reverse was true: a local issue repeatedly injected itself into "normal" partisan politics, wrecking any attempt to relate county candidates with Whig or Democratic "ideology." Finally, Hinds County's 1859 elections turned entirely on a state measure that made their Circuit Court "ambulatory" for citizens of Jackson, allowing them to conduct their business there, rather than travel the sixteen miles to Raymond. This culminated the decade of agitation and hostility between the two towns. "[W]hen it was proposed to build a new Court House at Raymond, the people of Jackson opposed it," wrote editor George Harper, leader of Raymond's opposition. "*Their* member of the Board of Police, acting under instructions, opposed every step for the erection of a new building."⁵¹ Harper's language demonstrated not only malevolence between the two towns, but also the intracounty regionalism that framed Board politics. Men formed tickets dedicated to "Repeal" or "Anti-Repeal," with voters following expected regional loyalties.⁵²

A similar court house dispute in Jasper County summarized the interplay of personal and neighborhood loyalties within the bounds of a local issue that erased existing partisanship. The county seat of Paulding was about five miles east of Jasper's geographic

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, May 11, 1848; March 2, 1853.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, March 16, 1859.

⁵² *Hinds County Gazette*, March 2 and June 8, 1859. See also the *Eastern Clarion*, Feb. 19, 1859.

center. A movement of disgruntled western farmers, including a number of land speculators wanted to erect a new building, thereby generating a new town around it. Citizens of Paulding, led by powerful Democratic editor Simeon Roe Adams, and residents in eastern Jasper opposed the measure as extravagant and unnecessary. The public confrontation began in 1857 when a faction of Democrats from western Jasper repudiated its party's nominee for the state legislature, who was not pledged to removal. The bolters then nominated their own removal candidate who won election after the original nominee withdrew, in the interests of party harmony. Over the next two years, though, the two factions became increasingly hostile. (The courthouse issue similarly had split the county American party.) Early in 1859 the Board of Police authorized a tax to fund construction and empowered a commission to site the new building.

Arguments for and against removal included a bewildering array of charges and counter-charges involving needless taxation, a disputed election, interpretation of an earlier state law, and just exactly what constituted the "geographic center" of Jasper county. The removal forces had won a county-wide referendum on the issue, which had prompted the Board's initial action. Their opponents, who enjoyed the forum of Adams's widely circulated *Eastern Clarion*, branded the election illegal because Sheriff Lemuel B. Lassiter improperly pledged the returning officers. Furthermore, the Board instructed its commissioners to find a site within "one mile" of the county's geographic center. Adams noted sarcastically that justice would therefore be served in the middle of Tallahala swamp. Paulding, in other words, was about as close to "geographic center" as the citizens could hope for. Finally, the anti-removal forces focused attention on the state law that designated

Paulding as county seat "forever" and permanently. Removal would be an affront to men of Paulding who invested in land and tied their future to the town, believing citizens would honor the words "permanent" and "forever." "For the sake of a few miles ride," one critic summarized, the removal faction proposed to plunge the county into debt "and violate what amounts to a solemn agreement between the county itself, and the citizens of Paulding."⁵³

The anti-removal men appealed the disputed election to the Board of Policemen, who refused to adjudicate on grounds they held no jurisdiction. The vote, following regional lines, was three to two: John H. Gray (representing northwest beat), Coleman Copeland (southwest) and William Pugh (center), against President Thomas B. Heslip (southeast) and Major John J. Harry (northeast). As provided by law, the case then proceeded to Circuit Court, where Judge [Jared] Watts, with his eyes on the October election (in which he was a candidate), decided to continue it until next term. With the case unsettled, each side organized for the 1859 campaign. A call from "Many Tax Payers" drew a large meeting on March 30 in Paulding, against removal. The organizers carefully presented the meeting as representative of all Jasper, resolved to make removal the "only issue" in electing a county representative, and "utterly discard[ed] the question of party politics." "[U]ntil this matter is finally settled, we will recognize no other issue in elections for members of the Legislature, but that of 'removal or no removal'."⁵⁴

⁵³ *Eastern Clarion*, March 16, 1859 (quote), and March 23. For a synopsis, see also May 19.

⁵⁴ *Eastern Clarion*, March 30, 1859 (quote) and March 23 (BOP vote). Editor Adams added that "we care not one stiver whether such a man be Whig, Democrat, American, or what not, so far as politics is concerned; he will be entitled to the support

Despite this organizational momentum, neither side made nominations for county representative. Editor Adams explained that the anti-removal party declined at this time because Spring flooding prevented many of their rural supporters from attending the Paulding meeting. In addition, the election was still six months away.⁵⁵ Several correspondents, however, soon related a different, and ultimately compelling reason to forego nominations.

The voters, they argued, would never separate the courthouse issue from "personal" motivations. One regular contributor, who signed letters simply "H," claimed that the majority of those who resisted nominations actually cared little about when the election was. Rather, they believed that the "personal influence of the opposing candidates would be brought to bear," which would be decisive.⁵⁶ In other words, regardless of how compelling the courthouse issue seemed, and no matter how much the voters disliked taxes, they would still vote out of loyalty to friends, neighbors, and kin. This imperative, he maintained, made nominations for the legislature based on "removal or no removal" pointless. Leaders from both sides pondered their options for several weeks and sought advice from local citizens. Lazarus J. Jones was one who offered his opinion, after many requests. A planter who owned twenty slaves, Jones was a former state representative and long-time resident of the county. He agreed with "H's" assessment. Jones advised that

of every anti-removal man in the county" (April 13).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, April 6, 1859.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, April 20, 1859.

running candidates for the legislature "would never work," for a number of reasons. Most importantly, the "personal popularity" of the winner would always be regarded, by the losers, as the cause of their demise. The defeated faction would therefore not acquiesce in the outcome. Instead, to gauge the "true sentiment" of Jasper's tax payers, there should be a referendum on the "naked" question of removal or no removal. Each side took the recommendations of Jones, "H," and others and made no nominations.⁵⁷

The race became even more chaotic when George W. Ryan entered as an "independent" candidate. He agreed with Jones regarding the courthouse issue, favoring resubmission to the people, but also took a stand against reopening the slave trade. This conflicted with many Democratic state leaders, but coincided with that of editor Simeon Adams. After stirring up the slave trade debate, Ryan promptly resigned the canvass. That left Peter Loper and A. F. Dantzler. The former put his faith in Circuit Judge Watts. If he ruled the original election legal, then the courthouse would be removed. Dantzler favored a new referendum. He won, 549 to 500.

The race for senator from the district of Jasper, Clarke and Wayne counties proved even more puzzling. It involved three candidates, the slave trade issue, the courthouse issue (in Jasper), a controversy surrounding one candidate who was a minister (churchmen running for political office had been a persistent debate in Mississippi), and a temporary candidate who advocated free public schools but then resigned. There was one "official"

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, May 11 and June 8, 1859.

Democratic nominee, another Democrat who ran and got more votes, and a third "independent" who attacked the caucus system.⁵⁸

While not every election for state legislature became this complicated, voters in Jasper had ample reason to fall back on the clarity of neighborhood and kinship ties. Given the limitations of voting data, and in lieu of personal letters describing the operation of neighborhood networks, one can only infer some motivation. But the issue of the Jasper courthouse underscored again the fragility of party labels and loyalties. It made evident the danger of imputing a connection between Whig, Democrat, or American "ideology" and what was happening at the local level. The "partisan culture" in Mississippi was extremely shallow, rarely extending to county elections and frequently failing even to command races for state legislature. Finally, in this case, as in Hinds County, a local question became the driving force in a normally partisan election, demonstrating that the flow of issues was not simply from national to state to local, but rather more variable.

*

County and state legislators recognized the power of neighborhoods, they organized local administration and designed legislation to accommodate it. Their actions not only acknowledged but also facilitated the localistic orientation of political life--priorities demonstrated in the method of electing Policemen. Amendment Two of the 1832 state constitution specified that voters would choose five BOP members, "one from each district." Initially, the legislature interpreted this to mean county-wide voting for all

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, May 4, June 1 and 8, Aug. 17, and Sept. 21, 1859.

candidates, with one resident of each district elected. Thus, only one of the two most popular candidates might take office if each man happened to live in the same district. This system encouraged a certain amount of partisanship (although there is no evidence of nominations), since, like state legislators, it would be difficult for voters to know each candidate personally, although they would still tend to vote for the man from their locality. In 1852, however, the state legislature reinterpreted the law and decided to hold a separate election in each district. This change meant voters could follow the same neighborhood networks they relied on for other local elections.⁵⁹

By reinterpreting elections to the Board and focusing them even more on the neighborhoods, legislators also acknowledged how the Policemen did business. Since each county included five districts and members represented their home neighborhoods (even before 1852), duties naturally revolved those divisions. One of the Board's chief responsibilities, for instance, was county roads. This duty depended on local citizens, designated as "road overseers" for each year. Each member customarily made these assignments for his own district, dividing certain roads into sections, naming one man as overseer and then apportioning "hands" to work on the road when needed, accountable to

⁵⁹ The law read that citizens "shall divide their respective counties into five districts, from each of which the qualified electors of the district shall elect one member." Anderson Hutchinson, *Code of Mississippi: Being an Analytical Compilation of the Public and General Statutes of the Territory and State with References to the Local and Private Acts, From 1798 to 1848* (Jackson, MS: Price and Fall, State Printers, 1848), 710. The issue was discussed in various newspapers, see for example *The Mississippian*, Sept. 24, 1845.

the overseer.⁶⁰ Each Board member's duty remained implicit, although several counties made specific stipulations. Claiborne County's Board resolved in December 1853 that, "hereafter it shall be the burden duty of each member of this Board, to find out all work that is absolutely necessary to be done on Roads & Bridges in his district and have the same done at the Cost of the County."⁶¹ Road overseers earned no money but did provide an "honorable duty" to their fellow citizens. As such, the appointments carried a certain amount of prestige.

Other Board actions did entail monetary remuneration that constituted significant patronage. Perhaps the most regular "rewards" a Board member might bestow on faithful supporters were fees for serving as election judges and clerks. At each election precinct the law provided for three judges, three clerks, and one returning officer. Customary payment was two dollars per day, enough to satisfy the yearly tax burden of many nonslaveholding farmers. While most judges came from the ranks of slaveholders, small farmers often served as clerks.⁶² These positions created a network of "clients" and friends who owed thanks to their respective Board member.⁶³

⁶⁰ See, for example, the *Fayette Watch-Tower*, May 1, 1857 (Jefferson county); or Harrison County, Minutes of the Police Court, March 1853 (MDAH). Each Board appointed road overseers in similar fashion, typically in the Spring term.

⁶¹ Claiborne County, Minutes of the Police Court, Dec., 1853; also Harrison County, BOP Minutes, Nov., 1860.

⁶² The demographic profile and significance of election-day officials are discussed in Chapter Six.

⁶³ Kenzer draws the same conclusion regarding county patronage and personal networks in Orange county, North Carolina. *Kinship and Neighborhood*, 55. These characterizations of patronage again parallel those by historians of the "First Party System"

Another source of patronage came from appointment to road juries. When any group of citizens petitioned to create a public road, the Board of Police commissioned a jury of "disinterested" citizens to survey the proposed route and make a recommendation regarding its feasibility. Typical compensation was one dollar per day. As with road overseers and election supervisors, each Policeman tried to select men from his own neighborhood when the opportunity arose. Every county needed road juries and election supervisors, but some others had exceptional rewards. Claiborne County, land of rolling hills and streams near the Mississippi River, had a number of toll bridges. Each year the Board of Police appointed several persons as toll bridge keepers, at a salary ranging between 300 and 400 dollars. In November, 1853, millionaire planter James J. Person represented district five on the Board, which included Toll Bridge Number 2. During that term, Port Gibson bar keeper Edward J. Rickhaw secured appointment as its overseer. Rickhaw was a perfect "city man" for country resident Person—single, bar keeper and former town constable, he had a wide circle of friends in Port Gibson.⁶⁴ Thus could Board members create reliable patronage networks in their districts.

Election supervisors, road jurymen and bridge keepers were only some of the most obvious opportunities positions of patronage. Equally important could be more subtle forms of influence such as granting liquor licenses or authorizing ferry services.

in the North. See Carl E. Prince, *New Jersey's Jeffersonian Republicans: The Genesis of an Early Political Machine, 1789-1817* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1967); and Formisano, "Deferential-Participant Politics," esp. 479-80.

⁶⁴ Claiborne County, BOP Minutes, Nov., 1853. Seventh Census, Claiborne County, manuscript schedules, population and slave.

Everything Boards supervised revolved around the five police districts and within them, polling precincts. Local politics naturally organized around neighborhood relationships, a series of favors and obligations between planters and yeomen alike. County authority touched virtually the whole adult white male population in some direct fashion--most obviously tax collection. These patronage positions likewise gave local government a pre-partisan, patron-cliental quality. By relying on the local population, particularly slaveowners, Mississippi's administration resembled that of colonial Latin America. The Spanish and Portuguese crowns, unable and unwilling to provide Royal officials, depended on white settlers to run the government.⁶⁵ Thus, the structure of local authority and administration also oriented Mississippi's political culture toward personal, face-to-face relationships, rooted in ties of kinship and neighborly friendship.

⁶⁵ This model is outlined in Murdo J. MacLeod, "The Primitive Nation State, Delegation of Functions, and Results: Some Examples from Early Colonial Central America," in *Essays in the Political, Economic and Social History of Colonial Latin America*, ed. Karen Spalding (Newark, DL: University of Delaware Press and the Latin American Studies Program, 1982): 53-69. MacLeod emphasizes the Crown's willingness to cede local authority in the interests of social control, see esp. 64-66. Supporting MacLeod's view is Peter Marzahl, "Creoles and Government: The Cabildo of Popayan," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 54 (1974): 636-656. See also Richard M. Morse, "Toward a Theory of Spanish American Government," *Journal of the History of Ideas* XV (1954): 71-93; John Leddy Phelan, "Authority and Flexibility in the Spanish Imperial Bureaucracy," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 5 (1960): 47-65, and *The Kingdom of Quito in the Seventeenth Century: Bureaucratic Politics in the Spanish Empire* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967); Frank Jay Moreno, "The Spanish Colonial System: A Functional Approach," *Western Political Quarterly* 20 (1967): 308-320; and Margali Sarfatti, *Spanish Bureaucratic-Patrimonialism in America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1966). This model of local administrative autonomy was extended to the Catholic Church, see Adriaan C. Van Oss, *Catholic Colonialism: A Parish History of Guatemala 1524-1821* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

The use of local squires extended beyond roads and elections. Each county customarily called on one man from each district as overseer of the poor and public schools. In Claiborne County, for example, commissioners of the poor included some of the area's leading men. For 1849 the Board appointed Milford Hunter, a successful planter who would soon become a Policeman himself; Andrew J. McGill, another slaveowner; Henry F. Shaifer, part of a wealthy family that included his brothers George W. H. and S. P. Shaifer; and James J. Person, future Board member and owner of 150 slaves. In 1858 the situation was similar. All seven men appointed were slaveowners, two members of the powerful Humphreys family, including George Washington Humphreys, who owned 199 slaves. Others were Henry G. J. Powers, who registered "only" 97 slaves in 1860, Dr. Thomas B. Magruder with over 50, and William Sillers and William Holloway, both long-time residents and Board members themselves. In Carroll County the Board behaved similarly. Overseers of the Poor for 1858 were Pearson Money, member of a large and influential family that included his brother James, one of the county's largest slaveowners; Stephen B. Arnold, another planter with more than 50 slaves; and Albert F. McNeill, who owned 35 slaves and 50,000 dollars in property.⁶⁶

In addition to serving as judges and inspectors at regular elections, the Board called on men of property and influence to conduct special elections. The Carroll County Board authorized T. C. Harris, G. G. Gordin, and Samuel T. Lockhart "to advertise according

⁶⁶ Claiborne County, BOP Minutes, Aug., 1849 and Jan., 1858; Carroll County, BOP Minutes, Jan., 1859; Seventh and Eighth Census, Claiborne County and Carroll County, manuscript schedules, population and slave.

to law and hold an election for Justice of the Peace in the Shongalo Beat occasioned by the resignation of W. T. Cain, Esqr." The same body "Ordered that Wiley Kelley & T. B. Kennedy be appointed commissioners to advertise according to law and hold an election for five [school] trustees of the 16th Section in Township 17, Range 5."⁶⁷ These instances, replicated throughout Mississippi, indicated how patronage and administration reinforced rural, neighborhood networks, cultivated by Board members who relied on a cadre of supporters and rewarded them with county favors. County government required support and prestige provided by the local squirearchy, a circle of fellow "gentlemen" who collectively managed administrative affairs.

The neighborhood was such a recognized feature of political life that state and county legislators used it to demarcate administrative divisions, and even codified it into law. The Boards of Police typically designated slave patrols by neighborhood. When Carroll County's Policemen assigned patrol leaders for 1860, they "Ordered that W. D. F. Threadgill, Calvin J. Coleman, Wm. Hobbs, [and] James Flowers, be appointed Captains or Leaders of Patrol in their respective neighborhoods."⁶⁸ Control of the subordinate population had always been a community-based exercise. Rumors of slave insurrection customarily brought forth local leaders in a ritual designed to unite the white population.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Carroll County, BOP Minutes, June 1858 and Jan. 1859.

⁶⁸ Carroll County, BOP Minutes, Dec. 1859 (MDAH).

⁶⁹ See Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 402-434.

Efforts to control strong drink and develop public schools similarly reflected faith in neighborhood stability. The law to regulate Inns and Taverns provided that Boards of Police grant licenses only when a petition from "respectable freeholders, or house keepers, of the town, village or neighborhood, in which such inn or tavern is proposed to be kept, . . . shall certify that the person recommended is of good repute for honesty and temperance." Much like local candidates, then, prospective inn keepers had to rely on neighbors to affirm their reputation. As this language indicated, lawmakers treated towns as the "urban" neighborhood. Another proposal to prohibit liquor sales in amounts less than one gallon recommended licenses only when the applicant presented "a petition to the board of Selectmen of said town, signed by a majority of the head of families residing therein, recommending the person . . . as [one] of good moral character." The eventual law incorporated these sentiments and extended them to rural areas. It required any hopeful liquor dealer to obtain a petition "signed by a majority of the legal voters in the police district," attesting to his "good reputation." After the petition was given to the Board of Police, anyone opposed to it had one month to present his appeal, again signed by a majority of household heads. "Any name found on both petitions shall be counted against the granting of the license," the law continued, "and if any police district . . . shall by a majority of legal voters, petition the police court against the granting of license to retail spirituous liquors, such license shall not be granted to *any applicant* . . . for twelve months."⁷⁰

⁷⁰ William L. Sharkey, et. al., *The Revised Code of the Statute Laws of the State of Mississippi* (Jackson, MS: Ethelbert Barksdale, 1857), 193; *Southern Standard*, Oct.

The state, then, relied on each village, town, and rural neighborhood to regulate liquor by community sanction. If the community of white male household heads thought a man of "good reputation" and "moral character," then he might run a tavern. But if they failed to affirm his claim, then he lost favor. In either case, lawmakers codified the power of town or neighborhood as a political and legal entity entitled to pass judgement. Another proposal to organize schools revealed the same sentiment. "Any neighborhood, organizing itself into a school district," the law ran, which provided a school house and a minimum number of pupils, "should be entitled to the services of a competent teacher for ten months in the year at the expense of the county."⁷¹ Once again state legislators relied on the ability of rural communities to run basic government operations, much as Boards of Police used the local gentry.

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Politics in antebellum Mississippi was defined by neighborhoods. Candidates relied on community sanction and solid support from a personal network of local friends and kinsmen to get elected. The neighborhood remained such a continuing force that legislators enshrined it in county and state law, helping to maintain Mississippi's pre-partisan political culture up to secession.⁷² This localized system of face-to-face relationships rested on a

31, 1852; Sharkey, et. al., *The Revised Code*, 198.

⁷¹ *Hinds County Gazette*, Nov. 23, 1849.

⁷² Kenzer, *Kinship and Neighborhood*, summarized comparably: "In politics, the neighborhood dominated political machinery and partisan allegiances. Although challenged on numerous occasions, the political strength of the neighborhood persisted up to the county's separation from the Union" (70).

hierarchical social structure. Mutual obligations and friendships between some men, and subordinate relationships between others bound the community together.⁷³ The structure of local officeholding conformed to the stratified social structure in which it operated, and which it in turn helped to perpetuate.

⁷³ This characterization unites the work of, among others: Kenzer, *Kinship and Neighborhood*; Harris, *Plain Folk and Gentry*; and most recently, Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

TABLE 5-1
Amite County, 1855
Police District Four

candidate/office	Smith's box	Spurlock's box	Total
Eli S. Westbrook/JOP	34	0	34
Reiley Corcoran/JOP	33	0	33
John C. Wilson/JOP	0	26	26
A. W. Westbrook/const.	27	0	27
Samuel Tarver/const.	6	0	6
S. T. Wilkinson/const.	23	0	23
Mark Tarver/const.	0	19	19

TABLE 5-2
Amite County, 1855
Police District Two

candidate/office	Thickwoods	Toler's box	Total
Moses Jackson/BOP	19	18	37
L. G. Gayle/BOP	29	0	29
A. H. Kirkland/JOP	19	0	18
Francis Hitchcock/JOP	19	0	19
Archibald Cain/JOP	0	18	18
D. A. Faust/const.	0	18	18

TABLE 5-3
Carroll County, 1855
Police District One

candidate/office	Greenwood	Sidon	Black Hawk	Total
Patrick H. Brown/BOP	79	5	7	91
William McD Martin/BOP	0	20	113	133
Jesse C. Wood/JOP	62	0	0	62
William Smith/JOP	11	0	28	39
John W. McRae/JOP	2	20	100	131
Simon T. Lane/JOP	4	29	91	114
James M. Fansher/const.	0	20	93	113
Richard A. Jones/const.	0	0	28	28

TABLE 5-4
Carroll County, 1855
Police District Two

candidate/office	Point LeFlore	Smith's Mills	Jefferson	Total
Nathan A. Milton/BOP	21	4	0	25
Jesse Pitman/BOP	5	44	17	66
Drury L. Wingfield/BOP	0	57	14	71
George Hightower/JOP	3	78	0	81
R. S. Kerr/JOP	0	50	0	50
W. G. Tidwell/JOP	1	33	0	34
R. T. Gray/JOP	24	16	0	40
Allen M. Stinson/const.	0	50	0	50
A. M. Kirby/const.	0	45	0	45
W. H. Chapman/const.	0	23	0	23

TABLE 5-5
Hinds County, 1849
Utica & Auburn Beat

candidate/office	Utica box	Auburn box	Total
John J. Critchlow/JOP	44	23	67
J. P. Daniels/JOP	50	67	117*
Robert Jones/JOP	24	105	129*
William H. Taylor/JOP	9	31	40
James J. Luckin/const.	52	22	74*
J. Kelly/const.	2	29	31*
Robert Dean/const.	6	2	8
L. Yates/const.	0	6	6

*=elected

TABLE 5-6
Hinds County, 1855
Raymond & McManus' Store Beat

candidate/office	Raymond box	McManus' Store	Total
Lemuel Hudson/JOP	0	23	23
B. F. Trimble/JOP	150	0	150*
Joseph Gray/JOP	125	0	125*
William G. Moore/JOP	116	0	116
Joseph Martin/const.	0	14	14
Mr. Dunn/const.	0	13	13
A. J. Willis/const.	190	0	190*
John A. Gallman	165	0	165

*=elected

TABLES 5-7.a and 5-7.b
Hinds County, 1860

candidate/office	Dry Grove box	Burnett's Wells	Total
John J. Parsons/JOP	33	38	71*
R. S. Underwood/JOP	31	0	31

*=elected

candidate/office	Utica box	Cayuga box	Auburn box	Total
J. Brown/BOP	69	10	1	80
M. Stanley/BOP	16	37	40	93*
C. J. Brown/JOP	80	0	0	80*
C. E. Matthews/JOP	0	35	0	35

*=elected

TABLE 5-8
Bolivar County, 1860
County Treasurer

candidate precinct	James McCracken	William Stewart	W. W. Arnold
Australia	48	0	8
Concordia	43	12	47
Jones	0	11	7
Heard's	12	2	3
Beulah	22	26	27
Prentiss	0	38	1
Bolivar	0	31	9
Glencoe	14	19	8
Bogue	0	21	10
Sunflower	8	1	1
Total	182	161	116

CHAPTER 6
LOCAL POLITICS:
MOBILITY, HIERARCHY, AND DEFERENCE

One of the most enduring debates in southern history revolves around the nature of relations between classes. Did nonslaveowners defer to their wealthier neighbors in politics--as they allowed them to formulate cultural ethics and regional ideology? Or did mobility and American democratic ideals undermine social distinctions, creating a relatively open system based on the chimerical declaration that "All men are created equal?" Eugene Genovese's comprehensive vision of southern society suggests a world-view that prized hierarchy and stability, and was necessarily elitist. He contends that southerners embraced an "organic" notion of society that prompted most men to accept their "ordained" place. Analogous with Genovese's interpretation, Bertram Wyatt-Brown's southern honor relies on a community-sanctioned affirmation of status or reputation that bound stratified social elements together. A leading antagonist of this interpretation has been James Oakes. Oakes underscores the tremendous mobility that characterized all of nineteenth-century America, including the South, and especially the Southwest. While he concedes that Genovese's interpretation holds some truth for a few long-settled regions such as the Virginia Tidewater, most of the rural South experienced too much demographic turnover to support a stratified social order based on face-to-face relationships. By

implication, Oakes's southerners would not have deferred to men of "greater status" or placed much value on the opinions of temporary neighbors. Rather, he contends that American liberalism and slavery were so widespread, figuring both ownership and hiring, that they embraced the overwhelming majority of white men, engendering a common outlook and faith in essential equality.¹

¹ Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965), *The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969), "Yeoman Farmers in a Slaveholders' Democracy," in Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983): 249-264, and [new book, full cite needed]; James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), and *Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of the Old South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983). Many have characterized the essence of this debate as one between "planter dominance" and "yeoman independence." Scholars who support the former, including Genovese and Wyatt-Brown, essentially conclude that different social classes within the South enjoyed a basic harmony of interests, goals, and cultural values, whether founded on the planters' "hegemonic" economic and cultural power (in Genovese's case), regionally distinctive ethics such as honor, or simply racial solidarity. George Fredrickson, one champion of the popular "race thesis," termed the South a "Herrenvolk Democracy" based on race hatred and fear of slave insurrection that united all whites and muted class distinctions. See *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971). Contrarily, the "yeoman independence" scholars argue that class division and conflict characterized much of southern history. In their analysis, the majority nonslaveowners exercised cultural and political autonomy, refusing to abdicate power to a minority that they resented and distrusted. Two review essays that summarize some of this material are James C. Bonner, "Plantation and Farm: The Agricultural South," in Arthur S. Link and Rembert W. Patrick, eds., *Writing Southern History: Essays in Historiography in Honor of Fletcher M. Green* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), and Randolph B. Campbell, "Planters and Plain Folks: The Social Structure of the Antebellum South," in John B. Boles and Evelyn Thomas Nolen, eds., *Interpreting Southern History: Historiographical Essays in Honor of Stanford W. Higginbotham* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 48-77. Many recent works on secession, discussed in the Introduction, rely on this interpretation,

The question of yeoman/slaveholder relations, then, remains a lively topic among

although Oakes has been the foremost advocate of this position.

In his first work, *The Ruling Race*, Oakes placed mobility at the heart of a "slaveholding world view" that "equated upward mobility with westward migration (68)." This all-consuming pilgrimage naturally destroyed existing ties of friendship and neighborhood, denying their centrality to political life, or to a cultural value system based on face-to-face relationships. Oakes acknowledges that southern society was "highly stratified" (what society is not?), but denounces the notion of deference--that men accepted their proper place, and that status could be hereditary. He maintains that "conservative" thinkers (those roughly analogous to Genovese's world view) were "isolated," "alienated" and "anachronistic" after the Revolution. Their "paternalistic" notions of class relations, which "accepted social inequality as inevitable (209)," represented a "dying tradition" of "patriarchal family values" and hereditary status, all of which crumbled beneath "the entrepreneurial slaveholding culture of the antebellum South (203)." Thus, Oakes' southerners placed little value on family honor or ideas of extended kinship and community solidarity--the obsession with nearly constant migration destroyed them. In sum, "the rule of the elite succumbed to the age of the 'common man'; a stable slaveholding culture was displaced by a mobile one (223)."

In *Slavery and Freedom* he extended the argument that status=wealth; family honor held little meaning after the Revolution. Among slaveholders in particular, patriarchal values became largely obsolete, undermined by partible inheritance, the migratory impulse, and bourgeois capitalism. Among yeomen, however, communal and patriarchal values remained central. This distinction highlights his desire to make the line between slaveholder and nonslaveholder more rigid than in the earlier work. The institution, he contends, undermined community solidarity and a reciprocal economy, isolating plantations and driving a wedge between two different cultures. This argument, however, loses the subtlety and ambiguity that made *The Ruling Race* so engaging. Whereas Oakes had earlier emphasized the fluidity between a "class" of slaveholders and a "class" of yeoman farmers, he now makes the distinction seem absolute. The earlier work argued that a vast majority of owners held simply a few slaves, buying and selling, entering and exiting the slaveholding class regularly. Many more hired slaves periodically, all of which engendered a common value system among most white men--based in actual experience with the institution (including the tangible benefits gained from it, in addition to the honor accrued from a master's perspective), rather than simply racism or "Herrenvolk democracy." Instead, he now emphasizes the great divide created by slavery, which carried also into political ideology. Finally, he contends that southerners were all committed to a "meritocracy" based on absolute equality before the law. Democrats, he says, took from this a firm belief in social equality, while Whigs preferred to stress the argument's elitist overtones--the best and most talented will prosper in a true meritocracy. Each side accepted the "all-important conviction that a social hierarchy grounded in hereditary legal privilege was fundamentally illegitimate (121)," although Whigs remained "[r]elatively undisturbed by the existence of social inequality (123)."

historians of the antebellum South. In his earliest works, Genovese emphasized planter hegemony--their control of social ideals (basically, planter status) dominated southern thought and set the tone for cultural values that yeomen embraced. Later, though, he moved closer to a theory of cooperation, in which planters helped yeomen in the spirit of paternal neighborliness and obligations of kinship.² More recently, J. William Harris and Stephanie McCurry have both argued for cooperation between yeoman and slaveholders, detailing a complex web of social, economic, and political relationships that tied white men together.³ Furthermore, most historians agree that nonslaveholders perceived the very real benefits of maintaining slavery and thus cooperated with planters in defense of white liberty, race control, and economic opportunity.⁴ These historians, however, tend to skirt the issue of hierarchy (Harris), reject it in favor of white male equality (McCurry, Fredrickson), or instead declare it without much proof (Genovese).

This chapter will propose that the political culture helped bridge the gap between mobility and hierarchy. Mississippians, in other words, demonstrated both mobility and continued commitment to a hierarchical social order. An analysis of candidates for office

² *The Political Economy of Slavery* (1965); "Yeoman Farmers in a Slaveholders' Democracy" (1975).

³ J. William Harris, *Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society: White Liberty and Black Slavery in Augusta's Hinterlands* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1985); Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁴ See esp. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*; Harry L. Watson, "Conflict and collaboration: yeomen, slaveholders, and politics in the antebellum South," *Social History* 10 (Oct. 1985), 273-298.

and election-day supervisors revealed a clear stratification. This hierarchy of public candidates and officials both reflected and helped to establish Mississippi's inherent, widespread social and cultural inequality among white men. Contemporaries understood subtle distinctions between men of different status and demonstrated that sensitivity in the realm of politics. The socio-economic profile naturally varied from county to county--the cream of society in Jasper, for instance, would barely qualify as "middle class" in long-settled cotton country such as Claiborne. But a hierarchy prevailed, and wherever they went men seemed to know their place. Running for local office, like duelling, gambling, or shows of hospitality, was another way for men to assert their proper place.⁵

Furthermore, men who stayed in one place long enough sometimes moved up the ladder of local offices as they advanced economically and socially. The various factors that contributed to one's status--principally wealth, age, and length of residence--were interrelated. Ownership of slaves, though, remained the best indication of status and the most culturally significant mark of honor.⁶ A long-time resident might "compensate" for relative poverty with extended friendships formed over many years, or with a certain

⁵ On the place of hospitality, gambling, and dueling, see Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 327-361. "Each ritual encounter . . . helped Southerners determine community standing and reaffirm their membership in the immediate circle to which they belonged (331)." Hospitality was, in many ways, the most inclusive of these three experiences. On gambling see also T. H. Breen, "Horses and Gentlemen: The Cultural Significance of Gambling among the Gentry of Virginia," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 34 (April 1977), 239-257. Politics, another ritual encounter, was, at least in Mississippi, equally encompassing since the state had no property requirements for voting or officeholding.

⁶ On the importance of slaves in an honor-bound society, see Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), esp. ch. 3.

reverence often granted with advancing age. More often, young men used fortune or family connections to overcome their youthfulness. As men came of age or moved into a new neighborhood, local politics helped them find and establish their place in society. Finally, the election process itself, including the disposition of officials designated to oversee the process, further reinforced deferential relationships between classes and between generations. Thus, despite significant mobility, Mississippians maintained their stratified social order, making hierarchy and deference still central to the political culture on the eve of Civil War.⁷

*

The "public political community" included, foremost, candidates for office. But it also encompassed those men appointed as election judges and clerks, returning officers and road overseers, all of whom constituted the bulk of county patronage discussed in chapter four.⁸ One noteworthy feature of this public community was its inclusiveness. In many

⁷ Historian Richard Graham has made a similar argument for nineteenth-century Brazil. There, although few men exercised "formal" political power (in the American sense), each local chieftain had a following of retainers, clients who demonstrated on his behalf--some of them nearly "thugs" to enforce his political power. Reinforcing the country's social and cultural hierarchy, the "theater of elections" "worked to solidify among a mobile population the clearly ranked hierarchical order" (101). *Patronage and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Brazil* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990). The best study of mobility and politics in America is Kenneth J. Winkle, *The Politics of Community: Migration and Politics in Antebellum Ohio* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁸ The following discussion is based on a relatively large sample from seven counties, which included nearly two thousand men. Over 1500 of these were located in the 1850 and/or 1860 manuscript census schedules and county tax rolls (a more detailed description can be found in the Appendix). I have approached the concept of "status" as involving more than simply material wealth. Although property ownership was central, of

counties, especially those overwhelmingly rural, a good proportion of eligible men became directly involved in politics. Amite County, for instance, reported 764 white men over twenty-one years of age in 1850. The following year there were seventy-one candidates for county offices--nearly ten percent of the eligible population. Tiny Bolivar County boasted one-third of the adult white men as active candidates for office in 1849. These figures totalled only those men who became official candidates; election judges and other appointees who also took part raised the typical participation rate beyond one-third and almost to one-half.

The profile of candidates in each county tended to parallel that of the male household heads (see Appendix). Among all elective offices, slave and property owners did not predominate in disproportionate numbers. In Amite County, for example, 72 percent of all candidates owned slaves, precisely the same figure as in the county at large in 1850. Men without any property also acted as candidates in about the same proportion as the overall population. Of all the candidates located in either the 1850 or 1860 census

course, it could also include one's family connections, church membership and other voluntary affiliations, age and length of residence in a particular community. This definition made classification and exposition of data difficult. The peculiar and typically disparate nature of local election returns only accentuated the problem. In short, the information was simply not regular or standardized enough for easy presentation.

The figures in tables A-2 through A-29 should be considered estimates only. They do, nonetheless, relate a clear sense of the hierarchy of public offices at work in 1850s Mississippi. These aggregates, however, cannot convey entirely the perspective realized after studying more than 2,000 contests involving over 1,400 candidates. It is, rather, like trying to impart the understanding gained from reading several thousand letters and diaries with representative quotations. Information collected on election-day officials and road overseers was correlated in the same manner as is described above. All biographical information included in the text came from the manuscript schedules of the federal census in 1850 or 1860, unless otherwise cited.

nearly nine out of ten registered some property. This figure corresponds to estimates calculated by other historians for all of Mississippi. Herbert Weaver, for example, found that while nearly 20 percent of all male household heads owned neither land nor slaves in 1860, many of them possessed other property. "Statistical material and other available information indicate," he concluded, "that poor whites [property-less families] did not exceed 10 percent of the farm population in any section of the state." A more recent study reached a similar conclusion. John Hebron Moore discovered that in his sample counties, every slaveowning farmer also owned his land. Furthermore, "[e]ven among small farmers who owned no slaves, landownership was common." In short, the spectrum of candidates for public office provided a representative sample of Mississippi's white male population.⁹

Representatives and members of the Board of the Police (called "policemen") constituted the social and cultural elite of all candidates. In each county they were the wealthiest and most stable members of the community (see Appendix). Invariably slaveowners, candidates for these offices exemplified each county's leading citizens. On average, representatives sometimes surpassed the stature of Board candidates, although a rough equality existed between them. Some men even moved back and forth between the

⁹ Herbert Weaver, *Mississippi Farmers 1850-1860* (Nashville: The Vanderbilt University Press, 1945), 61; John Hebron Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest: Mississippi, 1770-1860* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 139-40. This conclusion supports, to some extent, Ralph A. Wooster, *The People in Power: Courthouse and Statehouse in the Lower South, 1850-1860* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1969). Wooster did not include local officeholders--particularly constables and justices of the peace--in his sample, and if one excluded them in Mississippi, his conclusion that slaveowners "dominated" public office would be essentially true.

two offices. Voters in Carroll County elected John M. Hamilton to the Board in 1858 and to the state legislature the following year. A planter born in South Carolina, Hamilton owned 45 slaves, living in Mississippi since the late 1840s. Joseph Regan, a planter with over fifty slaves served Claiborne County in the legislature until 1855, and on the Board of Police beginning in 1860. William F. Dillon ran for both offices in Hinds County, each year between 1849 and 1860. A resident since the 1830s, Dillon held over 25 slaves and valuable farmland outside Raymond. In Jasper County, the voters returned Duncan McLaurin to the Board in 1853, the legislature in 1858. Living amidst dozens of McLaurins, Duncan had resided in the area over fifteen years and owned several slaves. In Amite County, perennial favorite and planter Jehu Wall won election to both offices during the 1850s.

At the apex of the political culture, representatives and policemen symbolized the combined effects of wealth, age, and residence. Their ranks included some of the largest slaveholders in the South: Charles Clarke in Bolivar, Cowles Vaiden in Carroll, and John Murdoch and James J. Person in Claiborne, all of whom owned well over 100 slaves. More modest wealth, however, could be offset by family connections or public service. Frank A. Montgomery, only twenty-eight years old and a small (by local standards), but rising planter, won election to Bolivar's Board of Police in 1858, just three years after coming to the county. In addition to these modest assets, however, he married a niece of Charles Clarke, state representative and future Confederate governor. On his plantation,

"Beulah," Montgomery enjoyed close ties with his powerful in-law.¹⁰ Others relied on their status as local "pioneers," reflecting a formative role in county settlement. In Harrison County, yeoman farmer Daniel Walker seemed an unlikely Policeman, possessing no slaves and little property, but his long-time residence apparently offset these shortcomings. At the county's first Board of Police meeting in 1841, the members selected his house as the polling precinct in District Five, on Red Creek. Walker lived in Harrison throughout the 1850s, holding elections on his front lawn.¹¹ In Bolivar County, Orren Kingsley had no opposition to his election to the Board in 1849 and 1851. Although more successful later he owned only a few slaves in 1850. But Kingsley had been present at the county's first Board of Police meeting in 1836 and was among the ten original land grantees in 1831. Not an absentee landlord, Kingsley settled permanently and took an active role in Bolivar's early government.¹²

For those candidates who transgressed established boundaries, voters taught them a quick lesson. Men who tried to "step up" to a prestigious office such as policeman to which they did not "belong," failed universally. In Carroll County, blacksmith Henry

¹⁰ Florence Warfield Sillers, et. al., *History of Bolivar County, Mississippi* (Jackson, MS: Hederman Brothers, 1948; reprint, Spartanburg, SC: The Reprint Company, 1976), 483-484. Montgomery also accommodated the local Methodists by holding service on his plantation in the late 1850s. Anna Alice Kamper, "A Social and Economic History of Ante-Bellum Bolivar County, Mississippi," MA Thesis, Univ. of Alabama, 1942, 85-87.

¹¹ John H. Lang, *History of Harrison County Mississippi* (Gulfport, MS: The Dixie Press, 1936), 8.

¹² Sillers, et. al., *Bolivar County*, 10-11, 37-38.

Huffman, who owned no property, was defeated in his run for the Board in 1853. Likewise voters rebuked Julius Harbin and Thomas Harper, small farmers with little property. In Bolivar, voters rejected Nelson Blanchard. Successful for other offices, Blanchard lost to Isaac Hudson, an early settler and leading planter. Although Robert Moore owned two slaves and some farmland, by Claiborne County's standards he was relatively poor, and his losing candidacy was hardly surprising. Even John Woodhouse, a planter with over ten slaves failed to win election to the Board. He had been elected without opposition to three consecutive terms as the local Justice of the Peace. But in 1855, trying to move up to policeman, he ran against Richard Valentine, who owned nearly 200 slaves and 50,000 dollars worth of cotton land. Predictably, Valentine managed an easy victory. Woodhouse, who was respected and liked by his neighbors, was outclassed by his opponent's wealth, connections, and status.

Others tried to undermine an opponents' candidacy with hints that he might not "measure up" to such an exalted position. In Madison County's 1855 contest for representative, the Democratic editor referred to the Know-Nothing candidate as "Dr." Thomas Anderson. Editor Owen Van Vactor immediately responded in defense of his party's nominee. "Though he has resided about ten years in the same neighborhood with Thos. S. Anderson, Esq., yet this stuck-up piece of vanity and self-conceit, speaks of him as "Dr." The object of this small trick," Van Vactor concluded, was "to insinuate that our candidate was so obscure, that his neighbors could mistake his profession." Anderson, the Democrats implied, could scarcely qualify as a proper county representative because most voters failed even to recognize his name. Such a charge needed to be met; the doctor's

fellow partisans and neighbors acknowledged their man's recognized place in the community.¹³

Representatives and policemen were universally the wealthiest and most stable citizens in each county, composing the top of the political hierarchy. Among the sample counties, 305 men ran for the two offices, of which 277 were located in either the 1850 or 1860 census. Over half were found in both, reflecting their uncommon stability. Among representatives, all but two men appeared in one census or the other. These figures, nonetheless, still suggested mobility rates near 50 percent over the course of the decade, even among these most eminent members of society. Regardless, the hierarchy held true throughout the period and in each county, men everywhere knew who belonged among the elite.

County offices¹⁴ often brought out men of greater status than local candidates for JOP and constable. In one important sense, however, they formed a "pecking order" separate from men elected by precincts. Most candidates for county jobs apparently put financial motives foremost--fees allowed to these bureaucrats could be substantial. The coroner, for instance, received ten dollars for each inquest taken on a dead body. The clerk of circuit court collected money for twenty-seven different tasks--from five cents for

¹³ *The Commonwealth*, June 23, 1855.

¹⁴ Sheriff, Treasurer, Circuit Court Clerk, Probate Court Clerk, Assessor, Coroner, Surveyor, and Ranger.

swearing in each witness to one dollar for enrolling a court judgement.¹⁵ The men who ran for the majority of these offices fell into three broad categories of approximately equal wealth but different occupational and family experience. First, young lawyers and sons of planters just entering public life gravitated toward the three "clerical" posts of assessor, and circuit and probate court clerk. Second, skilled craftsmen and middle-aged farmers wanting to supplement their income favored the offices of ranger, coroner, and to a lesser extent, surveyor. Finally, candidates for sheriff and treasurer, the most prestigious county jobs, came from local gentry. Thus, although somewhat distinct from the hierarchy of precinct candidates, aspirants for county office could still recognize an appropriate position.

Sheriffs and treasurers, like policemen at the precinct level, were the wealthiest and most stable of county candidates. The position of sheriff offered some financial opportunities, although a significant amount of work. In addition to keeping the peace, each sheriff attended regular meetings of the Board of Police and acted as general returning officer for all elections. The latter function made his selection somewhat more prone to partisanship, albeit infrequently, than other county offices. Acting as treasurer provided fewer chances to make money, at least legally, although it was a position of status, indicating responsibility and trust. Both offices required the greatest bond for surety,

¹⁵ William L. Sharkey, et. al., *The Revised Code of the Statute Laws of the State of Mississippi* (Jackson, MS: Ethelbert Barksdale, 1857), 142-147.

reflecting their relative importance among other county administrators.¹⁶ Voters evidenced the significance attached to these jobs with consistently high turnouts on election day. While votes cast for ranger, coroner and surveyor often fell below those for governor or county representative, races for sheriff and treasurer generated a full turnout. In short, lawmakers and voters alike considered sheriff and treasurer the most important county officials.

In Jasper County, the typical candidate owned a few slaves, several thousand dollars worth of property, and remained a stable resident. They included Washington Cundiff, merchant and candidate for treasurer, who lived in Paulding and registered two slaves in 1850, 3,000 dollars in property ten years later. William B. Ferrell, merchant-farmer and candidate for sheriff, held four slaves and 8,640 dollars in property in 1860. Others were Lemuel Lassiter, sheriff and merchant, who owned six slaves on the eve of secession, and Seth Travis, merchant-farmer and would-be sheriff, master of five slaves. In Amite County, where the socio-economic profile was wealthier, it took more to aspire to sheriff or treasurer. Enoch George Wicker, elected sheriff in 1851, owned eight slaves and had lived in the county for at least 13 years. Former policeman John G. Morgan ran for treasurer three times and was finally elected in 1858. As a member of a large and successful family he registered more than ten slaves and 9,000 dollars in property with the census-taker. Peter Ratliff, born and raised in Amite County, waited until 1860 to seek

¹⁶ See Anderson Hutchinson, *Code of Mississippi: Being an Analytical Compilation of the Public and General Statutes of the Territory and State* (Jackson, MS: Price and Fall, 1848); and Sharkey, et. al., *The Revised Code*.

office. By then he had acquired seven slaves and over 20,000 dollars in property. An active member of Galilee Baptist Church, Ratliff had "made it" by the time voters chose him as sheriff.¹⁷

In other counties, candidates came from a similar place in society. Carroll County's treasurers included the appropriately named James P. Money. Born in 1778 and a long-time resident, Money owned seven slaves and considerable farm acreage when elected in 1849, 1851, and 1853. Three-term sheriff John O. Young was a tanner and farmer, slaveowner, and resident since the early 1840s. In Harrison County, where poor land and largely subsistence farming provided few wealthy planters, candidates for choice positions such as sheriff and treasurer came from the ranks of top artisans and merchants. They included R. C. Corvan, treasurer and merchant; William M. Jordan, candidate for sheriff and master carpenter; Samuel Staples, saw mill owner and hopeful sheriff; and Calvin Taylor, would-be treasurer and miller. Some of the men who ran for treasurer in Hinds County demonstrated a number of potential factors at work. As with policemen and representatives, voters usually rebuffed men who overstepped their place. Samuel M. Phelps, carpenter, and D. A. Cully, mechanic and owner of one slave, both received little notice from voters when they ran for treasurer. Phelps finished a distant third in 1853, Cully ran fifth in a 1859 special election. Howell A. Hall also ran unsuccessfully for treasurer, three times. But he finished a close second to Warren G. Jennings in 1855 and

¹⁷ Albert E. Casey, assisted by Frances Powell Otken, *Amite County, Mississippi, 1699-1865*, 2 volumes (Birmingham, AL: Amite County Historical Fund, 1948; reprint, 1961), 224, 228-229, 237.

1858, and lost by only five votes (out of twelve hundred cast) to A. L. Dabney in 1860. Hall, a Mason at the Pearl Lodge and owner of Oak Tree Hotel in Jackson, was also a business partner with David N. Barrows, a well-known Democratic politician. Both Jennings and Dabney were prominent Whigs and then Know Nothings, a partisan alignment that hurt Hall's chances in traditionally anti-Democratic Hinds County. Regardless of party politics, however, both Jennings and Dabney came from the same social strata as Hall.¹⁸

Those who aspired to sheriff or treasurer ranked just below representatives and policemen in the social hierarchy. Men of property and standing they showed stability and some personal success. While the cream of society declined to run for these positions, voters rejected those from the lower ranks who tried. The remaining county offices possessed neither the status nor the attraction of sheriff and treasurer. They embodied, however, clearly defined segments of society. While the overall patterns of wealth and slaveholding proved similar among the two categories (see Appendix), the men were nonetheless differentiated, principally by age, family roots, and "prospects." Young professionals and sons of the elite dominated the positions of circuit and probate court clerk and assessor. Since youth (as well as education) was a defining characteristic, many of these candidates also proved less stable than others. One typical probate clerk was Marshall P. Bates of Amite County. Elected in 1853, Bates was just 24 years old, son of local planter Richard Bates. In 1850 he lived at home but by 1860 had acquired eight

¹⁸ McCain, *The Story of Jackson*, 77, 145.

slaves and 25,000 dollars in property, most of which he probably inherited from his father. Similarly, Christopher Caine was 24 when he ran for circuit clerk in 1849. Born in Amite County, Caine was a new father in 1849 with three slaves and a few hundred dollars in merchandise. Like many young men, he moved from the area during the 1850s. Russell Davis McDowell, circuit clerk in Amite for most of the decade, was living at home and only 22 when he first ran for the job. Although he lost that race, he won the next four regular terms. By 1860, when he was still just 30 years old, he had inherited 11 slaves and over 10,000 dollars property from his father Thomas.

Elsewhere the situation was similar. D. L. Duke ran for probate clerk of Jasper County in 1860. Living with his wealthy, widowed mother he was 22 years old. Paulding merchant Thomas W. Grayson was 30 when the voters chose him circuit clerk in 1855. Grayson's modest wealth typified many clerkship candidates—he owned four slaves and about 5,000 dollars in merchandise. Also in Jasper, teachers Duncan McInnis and Thomas C. Moffatt ran for assessor and circuit clerk, respectively. These jobs, of course, demanded at least literacy and teachers were not uncommon candidates. Moffatt was 23 when he first tried for office, still living with his father James. In Carroll County the voters chose James K. Lea, young lawyer of 29, as probate clerk in 1849. Andrew M. Nelson, later elected to three terms, lost his first bid for probate clerk in 1851, barely old enough to vote for himself. Rufus Shoemaker was 23 and living at home when he tried unsuccessfully for the circuit court clerkship of Claiborne County. A student and later newspaper editor, young Shoemaker's father owned several slaves. John B. Willis, at 23 a candidate for assessor, was a planter of middling wealth. These men epitomized the

typical assessor and clerk candidates. Some were sons of planters, living at home and probably needed something to do; others were beginning merchants or teachers who likely needed the money. Most of all, they were young and educated. These men would not have tried for policeman or sheriff as they were not properly established. Neither would they have opted for constable or JOP--they were for farmers with fewer prospects--but rather a clerkship which signified their more exalted family connections or education, both of which meant a considerable future.

The remaining county offices of ranger, coroner, and surveyor, fell primarily to small farmers and in particular, artisans. For skilled workers with flexible schedules, these positions offered supplementary income with few demands. Men of modest wealth, they were chiefly differentiated from clerks and assessors by age and occupation. In Claiborne County they included Rane C. Hutchinson, coroner and livery stable owner, age 29, and Charles Johnson, assessor and grocer, age 34. William McKeever, who ran unsuccessfully for ranger in 1855, was a 30-year-old carriage painter. James Smith, elected coroner the same year, was a shingle and brick maker. Jasper County's candidates for ranger and coroner included printer Miller W. Ellis, hotel keeper Josiah Jones, and mechanic Amos J. Reid. Jones and Reid were both 37 when elected, Ellis was 25. Voters in Amite chose C. C. Vannorman, age 35, as surveyor in 1860. A tanner, Vannorman's household included nine other boarders, all of them skilled, single men including a teamster, dentist, and master carpenter. In Hinds County, 33-year-old John W. Hand, tailor, was elected ranger in 1855. The aspiring coroners and rangers in Harrison County represented a wide

range of skilled and semi-skilled workers: carpenter, seaman, wood cutter, merchant's clerk, and mariner.

Candidates for county offices, then, fell into distinct categories. These men seemed more concerned with financial reward than "making a statement" of their proper place in society, an attitude which led them to run several times for office. Whether successful or not they were often perennial candidates, and frequently for different offices. Furthermore, if successful, county officials tended to win re-election again and again.

Contrary to these men, the majority of candidates for Justice of the Peace and constable ran only once. Whether elected or not that was sufficient to establish their place in Mississippi society. For several reasons, precinct offices proved more effective than county jobs in establishing a social hierarchy. Each county had five policemen and between eight and fifteen JOPs and constables, giving ample opportunities for local men to enter politics. Announcing oneself for office typically cost between three and five dollars in the local newspaper, when editors collected the money at all. Their incessant calls urging delinquent candidates to pay up suggested a chronic problem.¹⁹ Of course, in isolated areas most candidates did not bother with newspapers, preferring word-of-mouth and a network of friends and neighbors. In short, running for office required little more than the desire to do so. In this sense, politics was again like duelling or gambling--the chosen means of some men to assert their reputation. The number of positions up for grabs also accentuated the nuances of the hierarchy. In particular, the differences between constable and JOP

¹⁹ See for example *The Fort Adams Item*, Nov., 1855; or *The American Banner*, Nov., 1855 and the Jan. 8, 1856.

illustrated how sensitive it was and how carefully most men perceived their place within it.

Most importantly, though, running for policeman, JOP or constable meant putting one's reputation on the line before friends and neighbors, those best qualified to render judgement. Men of honor craved recognition of their status, something strangers could not provide. Local elections, therefore, became more of a neighborhood exercise--involving values of deference, hierarchy, and honor--than a contest for county tax funds. Precinct offices offered the best examples of the hierarchy and continued deference that permeated Mississippi culture in the 1850s. As we have seen, policemen sat atop that hierarchy. When legislators reinterpreted the election law in 1852 (see chapter IV), they made these contests more of a neighborhood exercise, encouraging even greater deference toward local planters who dominated the Board of Police. Few from the middle and lower orders ran for policeman, and voters rejected those who did; below policemen, JOPs and constables incorporated all parts of society.

Legislators designated Justice of the Peace as a position of authority and respect. They had jurisdiction to resolve any civil dispute involving less than fifty dollars. This covered a great number of local debts, disputes over work and wages, and myriad transactions in the rural exchange economy. For most Mississippi farmers, fifty dollars was a lot of money. The annual tax burden, for example, typically failed to reach ten dollars--including both state and county taxes. In Harrison, Jasper and other non-cotton

areas, it could be considerably less than that.²⁰ According to one estimate, justices of the peace routinely settled 80 percent of all civil suits. The state "Manual of Forms" summed up the office as "warden of Peace and good behavior within his county, and particularly within his precinct," a man "of the conservative circle." "In him," the handbook's author continued, "the court leet is essentially transmitted, bringing justice home to the door." He also reminded citizens that Washington, on retiring as President, accepted the position, "an admonition to the People to cast the care on the wisest and best of the beat!"²¹ Mississippians commonly referred to a JOP as "squire."²² Constables could not, apparently, claim any former Presidents among their ranks. Lacking the legal power of JOPs, they assisted the sheriff and JOPs, helping maintain the peace. Constables reported to the justice in their precinct and returned all money and chattel to him.²³ Thus, acting as a "sub-JOP," constables made up the lowest level of elected officials. As with policemen, the qualities that determined status to these offices could be a subtle mixture of wealth and personal connections or accomplishments.

²⁰ In Harrison County, for example, over two-thirds of those listed in the 1855 and 1858 county tax rolls owed only 40 cents, the rate for one adult poll. Hutchinson, *Code of Mississippi*, 687-693.

²¹ Anderson Hutchinson, *Manual of Judicial, Ministerial and Civil Forms, Revised, Americanized, and Divested of Useless Verbage* (Jackson, MS: Barksdale and Jones, 1852), 41.

²² See *The Fort Adams Item*, Oct. 27, 1855, or *The Prairie News*, Mar. 4, 1858, for example.

²³ Hutchinson, *Code of Mississippi*, 694-695.

In each county, constables were younger and less wealthy than JOPs.²⁴ Jasper County, whose typical justice had about twice the property and number of slaves as an average constable, demonstrated the usual hierarchy among precinct candidates. Robert Donald was an unexceptional JOP. Elected three times, he first ran in 1856 at the age of 36. A farmer with three slaves and some land, he lived in the county more than ten years. Also representative was Michael O'Brien, a house carpenter and part-time farmer. Elected in 1849 he was 36 years old, owned three slaves and 1,000 dollars in land and tools. Addison Bounds, a small farmer with no slaves but 500 dollars in land, seemed an unusually poor Justice. Bounds, however, was 50 years old when elected in 1855, and a resident of the state for at least 25 years. The experience of another justice and farmer, John Harris, characterized for many the limits between JOP and policeman. Born in 1825, voters favored Harris as a new justice in 1853. A long-time resident, he owned one or two slaves and about 500 dollars in land. In 1858 he decided to run for policeman and finished third in a three-man race. The winner Coleman Copeland was older, a much larger slaveholder, and registered nearly 10,000 dollars worth of land in the 1860 census. Spencer Wade who finished second showed nearly identical assets as Copeland. Copeland and Wade, in fact, each received sixty-one votes, with the former chosen by lots, as was the custom. Men of the same social position, they were typical of Jasper's policemen; Harris, evidently popular with his neighbors, simply did not belong among the elite.

²⁴ Bolivar was an exception (see Appendix), where constables were slightly older than JOPs on average. This county, however, elected no constables until 1858, and the sample was only eight men.

Jasper's constables ranked below JOPs such as John Harris. Archibald Lovett, a young doctor, became constable in 1851. He owned no slaves and no other property but was a stable resident of the area. William Sanders, living there since the late 1830s, won election as constable in 1858. He owned two slaves and a small farm.

Across Mississippi men showed similar regard for the subtleties of rank. In Carroll County, precinct candidates likewise represented a flawless hierarchy, mirroring social and cultural distinctions. Jesse and Caswell Pitman, would-be policeman and JOP, respectively, again revealed the imperative variations between offices.²⁵ Both men ran for office in 1855. Jesse was 59 years old, qualified as a "planter" with about twenty slaves, and recorded an impressive 36,000 dollars worth of land in the 1860 census. Caswell, only 44, won election unopposed as justice of the peace. Owner of ten slaves, he reported just 6,000 dollars in land. Thus, while both men were slaveowners and successful farmers, they clearly represented different strata of society. Between justice and constable, distinctions could be similarly demarcating. Samuel Pickens, JOP, and constable George Harvey epitomized some of the variables that helped determine one's proper place. Pickens was 35 when the voters of Shongalo chose him as their justice. Born in Mississippi, Pickens, who was a local resident for more than ten years farmed his own property with the help of five slaves. Harvey won election for constable of district six in 1849 at the age of 29. Also born in Mississippi, Harvey recorded two slaves and land worth 300 dollars

²⁵ The Pitmans may or may not have been related. They were born only 15 years apart, suggesting that they were uncle and nephew or even brothers. Pitman was an uncommon name in Carroll county, although the two men did not live near one another.

Figure 6-1
Jasper County: Precinct Candidates

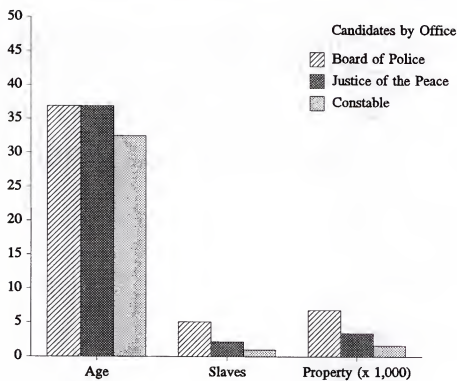


Figure 6-2
Carroll County: Precinct Candidates

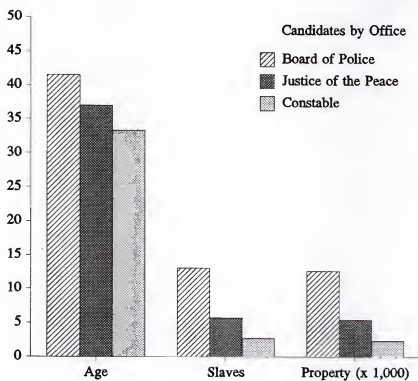


Figure 6-3
Hinds County: Precinct Candidates

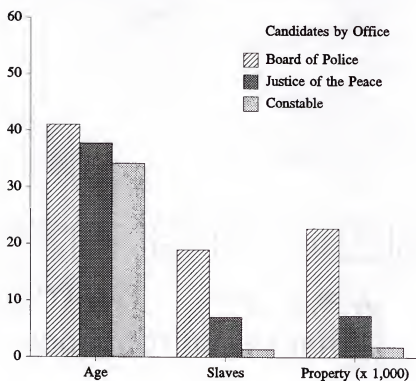


Figure 6-4
Harrison County: Precinct Candidates

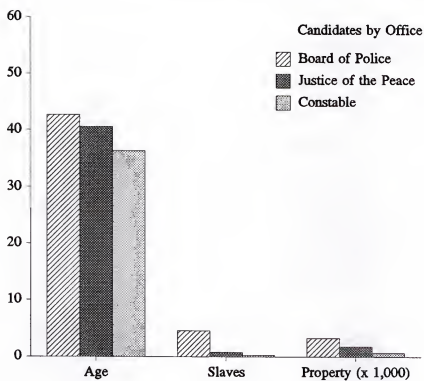


Figure 6-5
Claiborne County: Precinct Candidates

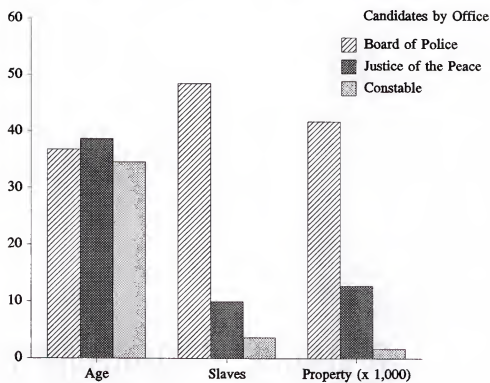
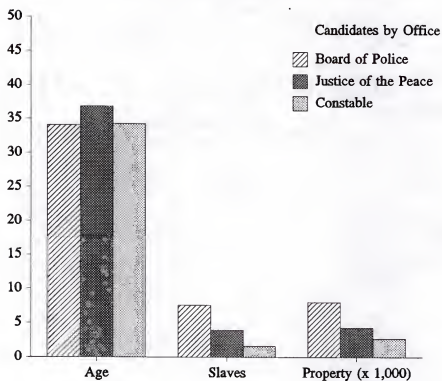


Figure 6-6
Amite County: Precinct Candidates



in 1850, and migrated from the area ten years later. Pickens, older and wealthier, perfectly fit the profile of a Carroll County justice; Harvey was younger and less established, and not a permanent resident. Many men, of course, failed consciously to consider such subtle differences. But the combined effect of wealth, age, and residence remained distinctive in each county--whether consciously or unconsciously, most men in Mississippi seemed to understand where they belonged.

Elections for precinct officials also reiterated the importance of family. Not only could powerful relatives help get sons and in-laws elected, but certain positions became almost hereditary, passed down from father to son. In Amite County, planter John B. Easley served the residents of district five as their JOP from 1849 to 1857. Living there since 1837, he owned 16 slaves and over 10,000 dollars of cotton land in 1860. When Easley's eldest son Harold turned twenty-one, their neighbors chose him to "succeed" his father as JOP of district five. Josiah Foster and his son Joel alternated as constable of district five between 1849 and 1860. Small farmers, the Fosters claimed no slaves in 1850, but by the time of secession owned two bondsmen and over 1,000 dollars worth of farmland. Robert Neal, Sr. and Jr. alternated as policeman from Duck Hill precinct of Carroll County, between 1853 and 1860. Born just seven years apart, the Neals were apparently brothers. Both successful planters, they actually ran against one another in 1855 with Robert, Sr. winning a close contest. Some fathers and sons also reflected the hierarchy of local officials. Josiah Bagley was a candidate for JOP of Shongalo beat in 1853. Fifty years old, a farmer and modest slaveowner he had lived in Mississippi for

more than twenty years. Bagley's eldest son William, a merchant's clerk with no property, ran successfully for constable.

More often, the power of family connections became apparent when planters' sons ran for office. Family position still carried tremendous weight in 1850s Mississippi--voters deferred not only to the local gentry but also to the gentry's heir apparent. The citizens of Newson precinct, in Jasper County, favored James M. Kennedy for JOP three consecutive times during the 1850s. While he farmed a small piece of land and owned no slaves, his father and neighbor was a successful planter. Andrew Richmond was a slaveowner and prosperous farmer when his neighbors in Beckville precinct supported eldest son Matthew for constable in 1853. In the Duck Hill precinct of Carroll County, voters chose Daniel and Henry Salley as constables in 1853 and 1855, respectively. Neither man appeared in either census, and thus were not permanent residents. In 1855 Daniel registered only a duelling pistol with the county assessor; Henry owned a similar weapon and two slaves. Their father, however, was John H. Salley, one of the neighborhood's leading citizens. On his plantation the elder Salley managed nearly thirty slaves and rode to social functions in a new horse-drawn carriage.²⁶

Although Harrison County boasted few planters, sons of the elite received comparable deference from the voters. Pierre Pradat, born in pre-Napoleon France, owned Biloxi's Green Oaks Hotel in addition to his 16 slaves. When son John decided to run for policeman in 1853, at the tender age of 24, voters gave him a two-to-one victory over

²⁶ State of Mississippi, Carroll County, Personal Tax rolls, 1855, Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH), Jackson, MS, microfilm.

Nicholas Holley. What made young Pradat's victory even more noteworthy was his opponent's honored position in the community. An early settler, Holley had served on the Board of Police for several consecutive terms before the 1853 election. A successful artisan, he owned slaves and nearly 1,000 dollars in other property. Yet, the Pradat family's status and connections apparently overwhelmed Holley, even though he had previously been popular with local voters. Family honor and position, then, fell from father to son with little difficulty. Voters not only recognized the social hierarchy when choosing their representatives, but transferred that respect between generations.

Voters' responses to candidates who "stepped down" to constable or JOP, when their community position entitled them to policeman or representative, offered further testimony that most Mississippians acceded to a hierarchical social and political structure, including deference towards one's "betters." Whenever this happened, nearly every candidate won election with the highest individual total, or, more typically, enjoyed no opposition at all.²⁷ In Hinds County, planters A. K. Barlow, John J. Parsons, and William L. Taber, who each owned about 20 slaves, ran unopposed for JOP during the 1850s. Archibald Clark, Jr., son of a local planter, likewise had no opposition in his election for constable in 1860. Claiborne County's unopposed justices included large slaveowners Edwin McCaleb and future Governor Charles Clarke (before he moved to Bolivar).

²⁷ The reverse--a candidate of high status losing for a lower office--virtually never happened. In each of the seven counties, such a result occurred about once during the decade.

Likewise, it surprised no one that planter James G. Railey, master of nearly 200 slaves, ran unopposed in 1851.

In each county the voters showed comparable respect for upper-class candidates. Ormond Kimbrough, a planter with 25 slaves and 40,000 dollars in Carroll-County farmland, went unopposed in his two bids for JOP. Local residents displayed similar deference toward justices James Liddell, Henry Matthews, and John McRae, each of whom owned substantial plantations worked by two or three dozen slaves. In Jasper County, no one opposed the elections of Robert Carson, John Crosby, Seaborne Jones, and Garret Longmire. Men of affluence, positioned to run for policeman or even county representative, they instead chose easy election as JOP. Such deference was not limited to JOPs and constables. When the cream of society entered politics--which was not common--their candidacy often went untested. Jasper's John J. Harry, Claiborne's James Person, and Amite's Jehu Wall, for instance, each represented the very elite of his county, and each enjoyed no (or only token) opposition in election to the Board of Police. When members of the elite did lose, their opponent almost invariably came from a similar social position--virtually never could a candidate claim victory over a man from a higher "class."

A number of men who ran unopposed for JOP or constable later moved up to their "natural" position as policeman or representative. John Huddleston, a wealthy miller in Harrison County won two unanimous terms as JOP in district three. Nearly seventy years old he moved up to policeman in 1859. Dudley Bonds, minister of Liberty Methodist Church in Liberty, Amite County, won easy election as JOP in 1849. Being well acquainted, Reverend Bonds, who also owned over twenty slaves and was one of the

wealthiest men in town, later served consecutive terms on the Board of Police.²⁸ This process also worked in reverse. William Oneal struggled to win election as a policeman in Harrison County. But when his term expired in 1853 he won unopposed election as the local JOP. Others who moved up in stature, and correspondingly in public office, included James W. S. Merrill, surveyor and later representative from Carroll County. In 1850, Merrill reported just two slaves and 500 dollars worth of farmland. A resident of Mississippi for only five years, he lacked the necessary wealth or accomplishments for higher office. By 1857, when the voters chose him as one of their representatives in Jackson, Merrill owned more than a dozen slaves, many thousand dollars in land, and qualified as a stable resident. When the census taker returned in 1860, he proudly reported his occupation as "planter," contrary to "surveyor," as it had been ten years earlier. Liberty merchant Ezekial Bramblett also moved up from city councilman, in 1854 and 1857, to policeman in 1860. Like James Merrill, the census recorded his progress from "merchant" to "planter." Men such as Merrill and Bramblett were exceptional, however. Most Mississippians who entered politics remained in one office and the majority ran only once.

The hierarchy of political candidates ranged from some of the wealthiest men in the South to some of the poorest in Mississippi. Slaveowners and property owners were not over-represented and in some counties served less frequently than arbitrary chance would provide. Most importantly, each local office corresponded to a particular segment

²⁸ Casey, *Amite County*, 602.

of the county's population, in which wealth, age, and length of residence figured most prominently in fixing one's position. When a man chose to run for policeman or JOP it indicated two points. First, his action reflected a social and cultural hierarchy that already existed, and which was acknowledged and obeyed by most Mississippians. Second, it served to establish his place in that hierarchy. As a new resident or young man, politics offered one more means by which he could assert himself before the community. In that sense, the local political culture operated in the same manner as duels or "treating." Running for public office--the correct office--conferred status and honor, granted from members of the local community.

*

The hierarchical structure of Mississippi society showed not only in the ranking of candidates for public office but also in the disposition of election-day officials. They similarly revealed a confidence in the "organic" nature of society and in the continued importance and potency of deference. There were two levels of distinction among election overseers. The first, termed "judges," "managers," or "inspectors," which varied from county to county, carried the most authority. Beneath them were "clerks" who assisted the managers and helped record votes. Each precinct typically had three managers and three clerks, in addition to a returning officer, assigned by the Board of Police at its previous meeting.²⁹ The policemen only appointed the wealthiest, most prominent men in each

²⁹ I had fewer returning officers to work with, providing a meager sample that yielded few meaningful results. My decision to afford them less attention stems from these problems and an inability to see any patterns in their selection.

precinct as inspectors. Below them, clerks came from the ranks of small farmers and sons of the gentry. Not uncommonly, father and son served as inspector and clerk at the same precinct. Thus, the local political culture again served to reinforce an essentially elitist and deferential understanding of social relations.

Inspectors had broad discriminatory powers over the eligibility of voters and ballots. The "inspectors shall take care that the election is conducted fairly and agreeably to law," stated the 1857 codebook, and "they shall be judges of the qualification of voters, and may examine any person offering to vote." They could, along with the returning officer, commit unruly voters to jail or fine them up to 500 dollars.³⁰ The returning officer theoretically commanded similar authority, although several hints indicated he was subservient to the inspectors. "The returning officer at every precinct is hereby invested with full power, under the direction or with the concurrence of the inspectors, to preserve order in and about the house where the election may be held." Another summary of election-day duties stated that "every person entitled to vote shall deliver to the returning officer, in presence of the inspectors," a ballot, "which ticket the returning officer shall, in presence of the inspectors, put into the ballot-box, and at the same time the clerks shall take down on separate lists the name of every person voting."³¹ In this account, then, the returning officer was more of a glorified clerk, carrying ballots to the box, while

³⁰ Sharkey, et. al., *The Revised Code*, 92; Hutchinson, *Code of Mississippi*, 161-162.

³¹ Sharkey, et. al., *The Revised Code*, 91 (emphasis added); Hutchinson, *Code of Mississippi*, 160.

inspectors presided over the grand event in magnificent consideration. For such an important duty, only the most dignified and respected men would suffice.

By every measurement, inspectors were the definition of success, the wealthiest, most stable, and most prominent and respected citizens. In Claiborne county, inspectors for the 1853 general election included Thomas Freeland, Jr., a young planter who owned 70 slaves and 50,000 dollars worth of cotton land. Others were D. J. Dohan, former policeman and master of 75; Daniel Willis and James H. Hedrick, both planters and substantial slaveowners. Less wealthy inspectors often boasted powerful kinsmen. William McLatham, hardly poor with ten slaves and several thousand dollars in farmland, was also part of a prominent family that included his brother Thomas, another planter with over 30 slaves. Inspectors in the town of Port Gibson came from the "urban" elite: merchant A. W. Hodge and master carpenter Amariah Rollins, a resident for over 25 years, Rollins recorded 10,000 dollars worth of property and several slaves. For the 1858 elections, the Board of Police designated the usual 18 inspectors for Claiborne's six precincts. Nearly three-fourths of the appointees appeared in both the 1850 and 1860 censuses, indicating their uncommon stability. The roll had three men who owned over 100 slaves and six more with more than twenty, and every one owned at least several bondsmen. All but one of the eighteen was over 42 years old. The only non-farmers came from Port Gibson and Grand Gulf: merchant R. C. Hume, watchmaker Stephen C. Keyes, and 28-year-old lawyer James S. Morris. Others who served during the 1850s included some of the wealthiest men in the entire country. Richard T. Archer recorded 221 slaves and nearly a quarter million dollars in property with the census-taker in 1860; William Briscoe and Smith C. Daniel

owned "only" 130 slaves each. While the county's richest men typically eschewed running for office, they regularly served as election inspectors.

Harrison County's inspectors also came from the social elite. For the 1858 elections they included Jacob Elmer, a successful merchant and county pioneer who had served as inspector for nearly twenty years. John Huddleston, policeman, mill owner and part-time planter also supervised the democratic process. At the same ballot box were Francis Peronsett, a Swiss-born merchant with several slaves and thousands of dollars in merchandise and F. B. Spence, a planter with 16 slaves and 5,700 dollars worth of farmland—a fortune that made him one of the dozen richest men in the whole county. Of the thirty men appointed inspectors in 1858, all but three appeared in one census or the other and nearly half stayed in Harrison throughout the decade. This made election inspectors more stable than the county's policemen, and nearly twice as likely to be permanent residents than all candidates for public office.

The overseers appointed for Bolivar's 1855 elections exemplified the disposition of both inspectors and clerks. Many of the county's initial settlers and wealthiest planters served as inspectors. At the third precinct sat Joseph McGuire, Christopher G. Coffee, and John V. Newman, the last a four-time member of the Board of Police. Each man owned about 50 slaves and thousands of acres of prime cotton land. At "William Vick's" precinct the "poorest" inspector was physician and planter John J. Ross, who owned only 36 slaves and 76,000 dollars worth of property; William Vick himself recorded nearly 150 slaves on his Bolivar plantations. The average age of all inspectors was nearly 50 years old. Contrarily, of the eleven clerks located, ten were still in their twenties. Perhaps most

interestingly, many were sons of Bolivar's gentry being socialized into public life. Some day they would serve as inspectors, policemen, and representatives and this was probably their first "official" duty. Robert E. Starke, a 20-year-old student and son of long-time representative Peter B. Starke, who also owned about 200,000 dollars worth of slaves and land, acted as one clerk in 1855. Others were Isaac Bankston, son of original settler Ignatius Bankston; James Ross, son of planter John J. Ross; and Joseph W. Elliott, Jr., only nineteen years old whose father was an early settler of Concordia Island and long-time resident. Another clerk was Frank Montgomery, future policeman and son-in-law of Charles Clarke, currently the county representative. Montgomery, a rising young planter with political prospects had recently moved to Bolivar, serving as clerk offered him the chance to be "socialized" into the local community. By 1860 he was on the Board of Police and an election inspector.

For men such as Montgomery, Robert Starke, and Joseph Elliott, Jr., the duties of election clerks were suggestive. These men represented the future generation of leadership, the heirs apparent of the neighborhood gentry. On election day they recorded the names of each legal voter and thereby the political culture reinforced the deference and hierarchy from generation to generation and among a transitory population. As local farmers and new residents trooped to the polls, their actions were supervised and approved or disapproved by the local elite. Their sons recorded the voters' names and each were introduced to their future patrons or clients. Whereas the disposition of candidates for office established and reinforced the existing hierarchy, demonstrating to contemporaries

where they belonged, the voting process was central in translating those relationships to the next generation.

Consider the scene at Bolivar's fourth precinct--William Vick's plantation house. Squire Vick and his fellow planters and neighbors Christopher Field and Dr. John J. Ross passed judgement on prospective voters, allowing or challenging their right to democratic privileges. Whether or not the inspectors actually exercised such authority very often did nothing to negate the symbolism of their power. Once authorized, each voter handed his ballot to William E. Starke, Jr., the returning officer. William Starke was only 22 years old but already owned thousands of dollars worth of cotton land and over 30 slaves. He was also Peter B. Starke's nephew. The elder Starke, who had moved up to the state senate by 1855, was an old acquaintance of William Vick, both having settled the area around Lake Bolivar and later Bolivar's landing. The voter then gave his name to one of the clerks seated nearby, including Robert E. Starke, Peter's son. The symbolic effect of such an arrangement could scarcely escape most of the voters or those seated as inspectors and clerks. For those unfamiliar with the local power structure, casting his ballot on Vick's front porch with the next generation of leadership on hand to learn the routine would have effectively shown him his place.³²

³² These local scenes undermine the idea that antebellum politics was necessarily "free" and "democratic." See Watson, "Conflict and collaboration," who claims that "[e]lections were free and frequent, political participation was nearly universal among eligible voters, outright coercion or bribery of voters was almost unknown" (274). Although balloting was no longer by voice, voters obviously exercised their privileges under the watchful eye of local elites. Another work that notes the "scrutiny of watchful eyes" in the election process, although it fails to develop the implications, is W. Wayne Smith, "Jacksonian Democracy on the Chesapeake: The Political Institutions," *Maryland*

Election-day officials, like candidates for public office, both reflected and helped establish the social hierarchy of 1850s Mississippi. The Board of Police appointed only members of the local elite to supervise and pass judgement on potential voters. Operating much like commissioners of the poor or school trustees discussed in the previous chapter, these planters functioned as an unofficial local government. County leaders naturally relied on the most stable, successful members of society to carry out their necessary responsibilities. By serving as clerks, the next generation of leadership became familiar with "their people," and voters in turn were encouraged to continue the deferential habits established over the years. Across Mississippi, inspectors and clerks followed the same pattern: established, recognized elites served in the highest capacity while their sons, nephews, and other young farmers of the rising generation assisted.

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Thus, despite demographic turnover Mississippians maintained a social system based on recognizable and acknowledged differences between men. The political culture reflected that hierarchy and functioned as one important means through which it became transferred from generation to generation. When voters chose their elected officials, they did so within a sensitive, subtle ranking of prospective candidates. Most men simply knew where they belonged and to what position they might hope to aspire. Society's wealthiest men often declined to run for office, although their place was firmly established and hardly open to question. When they did enter politics, voters typically deferred to them, and they

encountered little or no opposition. Likewise, the elite served as election inspectors, figures of authority who could deny voting rights at their own discretion, and provided symbolic foundation for deferential class relations. In that sense, contests for precinct officers and configuration of the election process combined to make neighborhood politics a ritualized expression of deference and confidence in the local gentry.

CHAPTER 7

KNOW NOTHINGS AND THE PARTY PERIOD IN ANTEBELLUM MISSISSIPPI

The intense feelings running through the late summer campaign shocked veteran editor George W. Harper. "Political excitement, asperity and bitterness, run higher at this time in Hinds county, than, possibly at any former period." He avowed that "[d]uring the last twelve years, certainly, we have witnessed nothing like it."¹ The source of this excitement was a new political party, an outgrowth of a secret nativist organization that started in New York City. The "Know Nothings" were a group of private clubs begun by nativist Protestants who opposed the growing political influence of Catholics and immigrants. Much like Masons, they maintained a secret membership through cryptic handshakes and code words.² The Know Nothings quickly entered politics with their own "American Party" that stormed through several Northern states in 1854 and 1855, sweeping aside old leaders and upsetting traditional party ties. Their secrecy often carried

¹ *Hinds County Gazette*, Aug. 15, 1855.

² On the origins of Know-Nothing lodges, formation of its political party, and secret rituals, see Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 20-31; W. Darrell Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press; reprint, Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1968), 34-44.

into office men who were not even known to be candidates.³ One Mississippian remembered the Know Nothings with similar amazement. "Men who were not even candidates were elected to office against popular candidates whose race was expected to be a walk-over."⁴

This Know-Nothing style--clandestine meetings, informal alliances and secret membership--had a bewildering effect on Mississippi's deferential, community-oriented political culture that was based on personal, face-to-face relationships. For the first time in the antebellum period, many voters' partisanship seemed to extend to county and local elections, producing a revolutionary outlook among many men: party ties superseded networks of friends and neighbors. Thus, the truly exceptional feature of Know Nothingism in Mississippi was not its nativist, anti-Catholic rhetoric, but rather its ability to generate such intense loyalty among so many voters. Other state and national issues had previously realigned voters (bank bonds in the 1840s; possible secession in 1851), but never had parties reached below state-level contests to organize voters in county and even municipal elections. Whereas few voters got very excited about Whigs and Democrats, the

³ On Know Nothings in the North and their surprise victories that shocked the Whig party, see William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), esp. 92, 100-101; Michael F. Holt, *Forging a Majority: The Formation of the Republican Party in Pittsburgh, 1848-1860* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969); Ronald Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827-1861* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 238-250; and Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 52-53.

⁴ Reuben Davis, *Recollections of Mississippi and Mississippians* (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1889), 345.

Know Nothings sparked a genuine enthusiasm and created, for the first time, a fairly widespread commitment to organization and party.⁵

Why so many Mississippians embraced the new party remains problematic. In the North, some historians suggest its secrecy--much like the Masons--was simply intriguing and lured previously inactive young men into politics for the first time. As one scholar noted, the order's "secrecy, initiation [ritual], and grips won many adherents." Like other fraternal organizations, then, the Know Nothings had a powerful appeal in the natural charm of camaraderie and fellowship. More importantly, once the order became involved in politics its members swore to support only fellow nativists for local offices--a logical extension of the order's predisposition for secrecy. In affirming the "Second Degree," each new recruit pledged to "support in all political matters, for all political offices, members of this order in preference to other persons."⁶ Thus, Know Nothings were oath-bound to vote a straight party ticket in all elections, certainly a fundamental departure from Whig and Democratic procedure. In Mississippi the new party made some formal nominations in 1855, but equally disruptive of normal politics was its covert organizational style and

⁵ On the relationship between southern Whiggery and the growth of Know Nothingism see Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South*. He also notes that Know Nothings made "strenuous efforts" to establish an effective state and local organization (126). For Mississippi in particular, see Donald Rawson, "Party Politics in Mississippi," Ph.D. Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1964; and Cecil S. Hilliard Ross, "Dying Hard, Dying Fast: The Know-Nothing Experience in Mississippi," Ph.D. Dissertation, Notre Dame University, 1982. A debate endures as to how much the Know Nothings were a continuation of Whiggery, in both their constituency and organization. Overdyke says they were, Ross says they were not.

⁶ Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South*, 73, 42-43.

impact of the "Second Degree." The consternation of confused Democrats, who no longer knew who to trust, testified both to the reality of Mississippi's deferential, antiparty political culture, and to the Americans's potentially transforming impact.

The nativists' secret code words and handshakes were undoubtedly fun for some men bored with the staleness of normal party meetings, or alienated and marginalized as Whigs or Democrats. An analogous appeal was the party's emphasis on antipartyism. In a political culture still defined largely by popular opposition to party organizations and professional politicians, the Know Nothings continued the same rhetoric. They had the advantage, of course, of being "new," supposedly uncorrupted by years of spoils-seeking demagogues. They were--as a hundred party spokesmen said--"fresh from the people" and untainted by the venal avarice of "snouts-in-the-trough" huckster politicians. A Mississippi Know Nothing condemned the "worn-out" parties in similar language: "One knows he is a Whig, the other that he is a Democrat; when that is said it is impossible for him to say *why* he is either."⁷

Writing on Know Nothings's success in the North, historian Michael Holt has termed this appeal the "politics of impatience"--that is, "impatience with established parties" that was part of a "general popular malaise," in turn the result of renewed anti-Catholicism and economic recession.⁸ In Mississippi the Know Nothings's antiparty

⁷ *The Fort Adams Item*, June 9, 1855.

⁸ Michael F. Holt, "The Politics of Impatience: The Origins of Know Nothingism," *Journal of American History* 60 (1973), 313. See also *Forging a Majority*, 140-141; Formisano, *Birth of Mass Political Parties*, 238-250; Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 96-98. Anbinder gives antipartyism somewhat less attention, emphasizing instead

rhetoric failed to stand out like it did for northern spokesmen (operating in a different political culture), but the nativists' hostility toward Whig and Democratic "demagoguery" was at least as prevalent as their predecessors. One contemporary summed up this appeal to men's natural curiosity and antipartyism: "When I first exercised the right of voting, I did so as a Whig; . . . [and] then voted as a Union Whig. From present appearances, it seems I may drop both, as the Knowing Ones consider the existence of such parties no longer necessary." He further claimed that the Know Nothings "scheme is a cunningly devised one. Enshroud any thing [sic] with mystery and secrecy and the attention of the multitude will be drawn. Curiosity governs the majority."⁹

Some historians also cite the party's Unionist message as another reason for its success among southerners. At a time of increasing sectional discord, Know Nothings initially represented a more "conservative" position. W. Darrell Overdyke's history of Know Nothings in the South posits Unionism as the touchstone of the party. Southerners, he argues, projected their fears of sectionalism onto foreigners rather than the secessionists among their fellow citizens. Cecil S. H. Ross's history of Mississippi Know Nothingism presents a somewhat more complicated picture. The movement, he claims, was at first defined by bipartisanship and anti-Catholicism, and only after 1855 did it move toward Unionism. The party's 1855 gubernatorial nominee, Charles D. Fontaine, epitomized the first stage: former Democrat, supporter of states' rights and secessionist in 1851. Millard

the party's nativism and antislavery attitude. See *Nativism and Slavery*, esp. 47-51.

⁹ D. A. McKenzie to Duncan McLaurin, Dec. 8, 1854, McLaurin Family Papers, Duke University, quoted in Ross, "Dying Hard, Dying Fast," 62.

Fillmore's nomination drove men like Fontaine from the movement--they could not accept a candidate who had signed the Compromise of 1850 into law. Thus, not until 1856 and 1857 was Unionism central to the Know-Nothings's message.¹⁰ Ecological regression estimates (see Chapter Four) of voting data tend to support Ross's hypothesis (see Tables 4-3, 4-4, and 4-5). Fontaine garnered nearly one-quarter of his support from former Democrats and another one-quarter from non-voters, only about half had been Whigs. But in 1856 Fillmore lost over one-quarter of Fillmore's voters back to the Democrats.

Whatever drove Mississippians into the new order--a combination, of course, of all these factors--the real significance of the American party was its attitude toward nominations, and its creation of voter loyalty amidst the community-based political culture of 1850s Mississippi. Democratic leaders responded to American tactics by pushing for their own county and local nominations. Even in counties where the Americans made no public announcements, Democrats believed their opponents had united secretly to elect only members of the Know-Nothing order. Across the state, precinct results from 1855 county elections demonstrated an unparalleled commitment to parties. No longer were residence and community paramount; instead, men embraced party loyalty as the foremost measure of political acumen. As during the 1850-51 secession crisis, the intensity of partisan conflict in 1855 further underlined the weakness of voters' attachment to the Whig

¹⁰ Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South*, v-vi; Ross, "Dying Hard, Dying Fast," esp. 191-195, 235-243; also "Charles D. Fontaine: A Mississippi Know-Nothing Leader," *Journal of Mississippi History* 48 (June 1986), 105-118.

or Democratic parties--it took something special for them to get excited about party politics, as editor Harper noticed.

The demise of the Americans as a national party seemed to sap the enthusiasm of many Mississippians, some of whom also began to emphasize southern unity in the face of northern aggression. The first split came at the party's 1855 national convention in Philadelphia. A minority of northern delegates walked out in a dispute over the party's "twelfth section" in the platform, a pro-southern statement of Congressional non-interference with slavery in the territories. One year later at the party's presidential nominating convention, there was a nearly complete break between the sections. Refusing to accept Fillmore, whom they considered a friend of slavery, the vast majority of northern Know Nothings bolted the party and supported Republican John C. Fremont. This final schism destroyed any chance of Fillmore returning to the White House, and apparently convinced many Mississippians that Know Nothingism was doomed as a viable party organization.¹¹

Despite this national meltdown, however, in a few counties the party organization endured longer. A new state law mandated county and local elections be held in even-numbered years beginning in 1858, separating traditionally partisan and non-partisan contests. Some party leaders, particularly Democrats who now enjoyed an even larger

¹¹ On the 1855 split at Philadelphia, and the 1856 nomination and final breakup, see Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 182-187 (1855), 261-262, 330-334, 343-346 (1856 convention), and 305-448 (election of 1856); Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 167-172 (1855), 194-209 (1856 convention), 212-2245 (election of 1856); Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South*, 127-142, esp. 131-133.

statewide majority, envisioned the new procedure as a means to extend organization to the local level through more frequent nominations. For the most part, however, these efforts failed; the 1858 elections looked like those in 1853, not 1855, and the state's party period had ended. It ended because the national party disintegrated; because once the Know Nothings became just "another political party" they could no longer claim the mantle of antipartyism; because Democrats skillfully exploited the obvious affinity between northern abolitionists and Know Nothings; and it ended because Mississippians increasingly spoke with one voice, united against Republicanism and northern "insults."

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The American party press articulated many principles common to Whig and Democratic oracles, including antipartyism. They were, in fact, rhetorically more committed to these ideals than their predecessors. When the team of L. S. Robertson and T. R. Stayman inaugurated their anti-Democratic newspaper, *The Fort Adams Item*, they began with a customary invective against party loyalty and professional politicians. "The pages of the Item [sic] shall not be polluted by the blackguard ribaldry, and offensive "buncome" of Whigs or Democrats," they avowed, "but will faithfully and fearlessly expose corruption, of any description in either." Other Know-Nothing editors voiced similar convictions. T. C. Jones of the Jackson *Tri-Weekly Mercury* propagandized his party's "destructive" potential, and the fear it generated among "mere politicians" and spoilsmen. "We do not . . . sympathize with those who dread the Know Nothings, as likely to break up the party organizations which have so long ruled our country, absolutely

and most tyrannically."¹² The Know Nothings, in short, vigorously renewed the Whig's antiparty message.

For their part Democrats responded in kind. Know Nothings, they charged, permitted members to hear only their own propaganda, which shackled men to one party's opinions and violated republican traditions of a well-informed citizenry. "There is something wrong in those politicians who shun discussion, and permit their followers to hear only one side of any political question," accused one editor. He claimed that "Know-Nothing documents alone, and Know-Nothing 10 o'clock and midnight speeches are all that are permitted to reach the minds of the members of their Fillmore Clubs."¹³ Another Democratic newspaper included a cartoon of the "K. N. Council in Session, Initiating an Outsider!" This comic image portrayed the Know-Nothing leader as half man and half fox, a sly, hybrid creature practiced at the art of deception. As he administered the oath to one new recruit, other members gazed on with blank faces and dumb smiles. The message was typical antipartyism: blind devotion to the Americans was simply uninformed support of wily political hacks who duped unsophisticated voters in order to line their own pockets.¹⁴

Mississippi's Know-Nothing leaders expressed grateful relief when the national organization allowed each state to go public with its platform and nominations, in June 1855. Democratic politicians had targeted their "secret caucuses" for months before the

¹² Sept. 2, 1854, June 23, 1855. See also the discussion of Know-Nothings's antipartyism in Chapter Three.

¹³ *The Oxford Signal*, Oct. 9, 1856.

¹⁴ *The Democratic Flag*, May 26, 1855.

change in strategy. "The Know-Nothings do not avow their party associations," protested Senator Albert Gallatin Brown, "and enter into no defence of their principles in the newspapers, on the stump, or elsewhere."¹⁵ Another partisan accusation charged nativists with being simply the Whig party under a new name. This time-honored Democratic device lost some sting, though, when the Know Nothings decided on gubernatorial candidate Charles D. Fontaine, a former State-Rights Democrat. American party leaders urged their man to emphasize his partisan heritage at every opportunity. Powerful spokesman William Sharkey counseled Fontaine to "[b]e a states right democrat, and an anti bonder, and avow your opinions boldly whenever occasion may require it." The new party, in fact, tried to nominate former Democrats whenever possible: "The people must be satisfied that there is no Whig trick in this matter or we will be defeated," warned another veteran campaigner.¹⁶ Despite these fears, election returns indicate that the Know Nothings captured about one-third of Franklin Pierce's Mississippi supporters (Table 4-3

¹⁵ "Letter Against Know-Nothingism," April 12, 1855, in M. W. Cluskey, ed., *Speeches, Messages, and Other Writings of the Hon. Albert G. Brown, A Senator in Congress from the State of Mississippi* (Philadelphia: Jas. B. Smith and Co., 1859), 395. On the party's problems with "secrecy" and criticism from Democrats, see also Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South*, 120, 292-295; Ross, "Dying Hard, Dying Fast," 113-116.

¹⁶ William L. Sharkey to Charles D. Fontaine, May 28, 1855, and Erasmus L. Acee to Charles D. Fontaine, 1855 (emphasis original); both in Fontaine Papers, folder 10, Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH), Jackson, MS. This problem was general for Know Nothings throughout Mississippi and the lower South. See Overdyke, *Know-Nothing Party in the South* and Ross, "Dying Hard, Dying Fast," 145-161.

and 4-4). Thus, although Fontaine lost by a margin typical of Whig-Democratic contests, the source of his support differed.¹⁷

That Fontaine snatched hundreds of former Democrats owed something to his former party allegiance, but the Americans's nativist message had an impact as well. The extent of nativist or anti-Catholic rhetoric varied from place to place in Mississippi, emphasized by some editors and virtually ignored by others.¹⁸ In Yazoo City, editor Harriet N. Prewett had articulated fear and hatred of Catholics for years and the new party simply made her outbursts more regular and concentrated. During the 1856 presidential campaign, she emphasized Millard Fillmore's twin virtues of Unionism and opposition to foreign influence with equal vigor and after his defeat rationalized that "foreignism and disunionism [were] too much."¹⁹ Where the population included an inordinate number of Catholics or foreigners, Know Nothings achieved greater success. On the Gulf coast, many French and Catholic families from Louisiana, as well as immigrant sailors from Italy and Spain prompted one Democrat to claim that "Protestant prejudices against the [local]

¹⁷ See also Ross, "Dying Hard, Dying Fast," 161-162. Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South*, disagrees, arguing that Fontaine's support was nearly identical to the Whigs's 1853 base.

¹⁸ Ross, "Dying Hard, Dying Fast," provides the most complete analysis of Know-Nothing nativist rhetoric in Mississippi, and emphasizes the number of Protestant clergymen who campaigned for the party and against Popery. See esp. 117-138, 234-236. And Ross, "Pulpit and Stump: The Clergy and the Know Nothings in Mississippi," *Journal of Mississippi History*, 48 (Nov. 1986), 271-282. Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South*, downplays anti-Catholicism in the party: "only to a limited and qualified extent could the party be labelled as anti-Catholic" (239).

¹⁹ *The Weekly American Banner*, Nov. 14, 1856.

Catholics" induced many men to join the order.²⁰ Finally, in the state's long-settled southwest corner, a Whig stronghold, nativism appeared more prominently. For instance, *The Fort Adams Item*, in Wilkinson County, tiraded against "Catholic despotism" and the unrepubliкан forces of Popery.²¹

The Know Nothings, then, apparently captured more Democrats at the state level than Whigs ever had, by nominating former Democrats and appealing to the same nativist prejudice that motivated many of their Northern counterparts. Most of their rhetoric, though, particularly antipartyism and pro-slavery bombast, remained strictly within the state's bipartisan traditions.²² But its approach to party organization, and particularly nominations showed that Know Nothings initiated a radical departure from Mississippi's customary practices, one that nearly produced a fundamental reordering of the political culture.

²⁰ Colin S. Tarpley to J. F. H. Claiborne, Aug. 3, 1855, Claiborne Collection, box 7, folder 40, MDAH.

²¹ See, for example, "Catholicism and Liberty," Oct. 28, 1854, or "Self-Protection" (against foreigners and Jews), May 26, 1855. Oakland College, a Presbyterian institution in Claiborne county, also felt the effects of nativism. In November, 1855, students delivered lectures entitled "Romanism versus Republicanism" and "The Huguenots," which celebrated Protestant heroes who fought Catholicism. Oakland College Papers, MDAH. Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South*, cites *The Fort Adams Item* as the leading nativist newspaper in Mississippi (226), but he fails to mention Mrs. Brewett.

²² For the similar experience of Know Nothings in Georgia, see Anthony Gene Carey, "Too Southern to Be Americans: Proslavery Politics and the Failure of the Know-Nothing Party in Georgia, 1854-1856," *Civil War History* XLI (1995): 22-40.

Although Know Nothings made Mississippi's first widespread attempt to nominate county office's, a few zealous Whig and Democratic editors suggested the same plan years before. As early as 1845, H. E. Van Winkle, Vicksburg's Whig editor, urged his party to nominate candidates for all offices in Warren and Hinds counties, where they traditionally enjoyed a majority. The Democratic editor of *The Mississippian* predictably declared that "all good men must deprecate the existence of that furious party spirit." Self-interest favored the Democrats's reaction, but Whigs ignored their party leaders anyway, and made no nominations.²³ Other partisans periodically made similar attempts to push county-level organization. "Believing the necessity of a full and thorough organization of the democratic party," wrote "Many Voters" in Lowndes County, "we would respectfully suggest the policy and propriety of their bringing forward candidates for every office in the County. " As usual, the county conventioners spurned the offer and nominated for state senator and representatives only.²⁴

²³ *The Mississippian*, Mar. 12, 1845. In Vicksburg, some Whigs occasionally urged their fellow partisans to nominate municipal candidates. They objected to Democrats in offices of such a staunchly Whig city, and county. See the *Vicksburg Daily Whig*, Nov. 10, 1843, Feb. 27, Mar. 3, 6, and 22, 1849.

²⁴ *Columbus Democrat*, July 28, 1849. The letter from "Many Voters" likely came from the editor himself. It followed two successive issues in which he defended the convention system, declaring it the only effective means to ensure party success. Although neither party had ever nominated below county representative, the editor hoped to show his fellow Democrats that they were missing a great opportunity to control all of the county offices. Again, typically, the rank and file decided that party success just was not very important, opting instead to support their friends and neighbors. For more discussion, including reports from several of the beat meetings, see June 30, and July 7, 14 and 21.

While rank and file partisans almost universally scorned the advice of impatient editors, Democrats in Lafayette county did nominate for all county offices, including Policemen, in 1849. Benjamin F. Dill, editor of the party organ in Oxford, *The Organizer*, apparently led the move for a more thorough organization. In May he began a campaign to nominate district candidates for judge and district attorney, supported by fellow Democrats in Marshall County. In his own county Dill proclaimed his opposition to "any *half-way policy*," which meant he wanted formal nominations for every office, or none at all. Democrats in three of the five beats followed Dill's advice and recommended local favorites for each office.²⁵ The county convention, which met in Oxford during the first week of June, put forward a slate of candidates for all county offices except coroner and surveyor, although their initial choices for sheriff and circuit clerk both declined the nomination. Dill's advocacy failed in the district convention, however, they refused to submit a nomination for any office except U. S. Congressman.²⁶ Lafayette county was strongly Democratic, supporting gubernatorial nominee John Quitman 840 to 622. The party's local nominees carried five of the seven county offices, losing for sheriff and probate judge. On the Board of Police, though, the Democrats could claim only one winner out of five, James P. Welch in district five. The nominations, then, produced mixed results. Why voters supported or rejected Democratic nominees remains speculative, of course (particularly without detailed returns), but party discipline proved equivocal.

²⁵ *The Organizer*, May 26, 1849.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, June 9, 16, and 23, 1849.

Editor Dill could claim victory in getting any nominations at all, but the results offered less encouragement for those who hoped parties might overcome personal loyalties.²⁷

While these efforts remained atypical, almost singular during the Whig-Democratic years, county nominations became common in 1855. In Attala, Marshall, Tippah, Wilkinson, Lauderdale, Choctaw and Yazoo counties, local newspapers indicated that both Americans and Democrats chose candidates for each county office.²⁸ These nominations, such a departure from tradition, did not happen without controversy. Editor William D. Roy of *The Sun* in Kosciusko, Attala county, admitted that "some little opposition [in convention] was exhibited by some one or two *water-gruel* democrats, to the nomination for Sheriff."²⁹ Democrats defended their actions, claiming that Know Nothings had instigated county nominations, first by making secret agreements to support only fellow members and later formally within the American party. "[W]henver they have been in the majority," explained one editor, Know Nothings, by making nominations for every county office, "have acted up to the strict letter of the maxim that 'to the victor belongs the spoils'." Now, he continued, they complain when Democrats respond with nominations of their own--"the application of *their* principles of action to themselves, where they are

²⁷ Unfortunately, election returns from Lafayette were spotty. Those in 1849 provided only a list of winners with no vote totals. Returns from 1845 and 1847 were apparently lost, and in 1851 and 1853 included no precinct figures.

²⁸ *The Sun* (Kosciusko, Attala), *Marshall Democrat* and *Empire Democrat* (Marshall), *Ripley Advertiser* (Ripley, Tippah), *The Fort Adams Item* (Wilkinson), *Lauderdale Republican*, and *The Weekly American Banner* (Yazoo City). Of course the parties may have nominated in many other counties that lacked newspapers.

²⁹ *The Sun*, May 5, 1855.

in a minority." The same editor recounted a similar story from Choctaw County, where Know Nothings, erroneously thinking they had a majority, "nominated for every county office, down to Ranger. They must not complain now if, to use a homely expression, Democrats feed them out of their own spoon."³⁰ The Americans, not themselves, had upset the rules of the game and Democrats were simply following suit in order to survive.

Partisan newspapers, in fact, provided the most obvious indication that politics had changed. In the past, editors seldom if ever commented on county elections, but with the coming of "Sam," county politics frequently surfaced in local newspapers. In Tippah County, the *Ripley Advertiser's* editor warned his readers that Know Nothings vowed to capture the county treasury and Board of Police in order "to get control of the school fund for their own pecuniary convenience." In a subsequent issue, Democratic nominee John F. Ford attacked his Know-Nothing opponent, E. A. Cox. Apparently Cox claimed to be a former Democrat, and now campaigned for votes on that basis. An enraged Ford charged that Cox was never a Democrat, having "cast but one vote in his life; and that was this last summer [1855] for the *nominees of the Know Nothing's* of the town of Ripley." Invoking typical antiparty rhetoric, Ford also criticized his opponent's machinations "when he sought the nomination of a party," while at the same time he "decries party spirit."³¹

Similar conflicts in Lauderdale and Yazoo also thrust county politics into the newspapers. In the former, long-time Democrat Charles Wesley Henderson had joined the

³⁰ *Marshall Democrat*, Sept. 1 and Oct. 27, 1855.

³¹ *Ripley Advertiser*, Oct. 11 and Nov. 1, 1855.

Know Nothings on the assumption it would not compromise his partisanship. When the Americans nominated him for circuit court clerk he promptly withdrew from the order and published an attack on its "secret oaths" and proscriptive policies. Democrats induced him to run as their candidate and editor Con Rea of the *Lauderdale Republican* printed a cartoon of C. "Wolf" Henderson devouring a hapless "Sam." Before 1855, county elections rarely commanded the attention of partisan editors, but Rea now felt the clerkship important enough to devote most of one issue to it.³² In Yazoo county, R. B. Mayes was "political editor" of *The Weekly American Banner* and also a candidate for probate judge. Several Know Nothings encouraged voters to support him out of party loyalty since he was so publicly identified with their cause. "In my humble opinion," wrote "Justice," "the American party should support Mr. Mayes to a man--they owe him . . . and his AMERICAN friends ought to support him." Although Mayes faced long-time respected incumbent George B. Wilkinson, the editor won by a comfortable margin. Precinct returns revealed almost perfect correlation with the county vote for governor, indicating that

³² *Lauderdale Republican*, June 11, 1855. This paper demonstrated the heightened importance of partisanship in all county races when it announced other candidates. "Capt. Daniels," running for probate judge, was "an uncompromising democrat" (Aug. 28); Mr. Bishop, candidate for coroner, "is well known as a good democrat" (Aug. 28); and Mr. Rushing, "the present able and efficient county treasurer . . . is an anti-Know-Nothing of the strictest sect" (Sept. 25). Before the Know Nothings, editors never commented on the partisanship of any local candidates. Interestingly, editor Rea did not extend his partisanship to beat officers: "This week we have an avalanche of candidates; among them are the names of M. L. Roberts for policeman, O. Clay for the same office, and K. W. Boswell for constable. These gentlemen are all well known, and are fully competent to tell the people what good fellows all candidates are. They all want the offices, and if they do not get them, we hope that they will not be distanced far by their more successful competitors" (Oct. 2).

partisanship overcame Judge Wilkinson's personal popularity.³³ These frank declarations and the request to consider party affiliation above personal friendship stood in marked contrast to county politics before 1855.

With or without formal nominations, confused Democrats revealed the importance of Know-Nothing secrecy and its power to upset traditional relationships. Politics, particularly on the local level, had been based on community loyalties, friends and neighbors, public relationships. Secret associations created doubt and uncertainty and broke down neighborhood solidarity. Writing to editor James H. R. Taylor, one Marshall County Democrat summed up the feelings of many in his party. If this Know-Nothing trend continued, "every man would be jealous of his neighbor. Who does not feel even now a distrust of his neighbor? You cannot tell who is a Know Nothing." He continued, expressing a deep-seated fear among men of honor: "The fact is, to use a common expression, there is no telling who is who, and what men are." Nothing could be more upsetting for men who trusted, above all else, the power of public reputation, and distrusted anyone who wore a "false face."³⁴

³³ *The Weekly American Banner*, Oct. 5 and Nov. 9, 1855. Partisanship still drove county politics the following summer. In June, 1856, Know-Nothing editor Harriet Prewett gloated over the party's victory in a special election for coroner--never the focus of any partisan interest before 1855. As usual, she accused the Democrats of forcing partisanship into the contest: "The Democrats were determined to make this election a party test, and we hope they feel satisfied--we do, most certainly" (June 13).

³⁴ *Empire Democrat*, Nov. 25, 1854. Editor Taylor actually became a Know Nothing in 1855, running for Congress in the first district.

Long-time Democrat J. F. H. Claiborne similarly had trouble coping with the new realities. He believed the local sheriff (of Hancock County) was a Know Nothing, possibly a mulatto, and "unsound" on the slavery issue. Claiborne also became convinced that Know Nothings infiltrated the election inspectors, unlawfully disqualifying Democratic voters and accepting illegal ballots from foreigners. Finally, he worried that Know Nothings controlled the mail. "We are afraid to mail any letters at any office in this county except Pearlinton [his home]," and claimed that "they have it in their power to suppress . . . our papers and documents."³⁵ Some of Claiborne's fears may have been more than irrational suspicion: Hancock County went from 80 percent Democratic in 1853 to a Know-Nothing majority two years later.

Know Nothings relished the doubtful expressions of their puzzled opponents. They recognized that secrecy and ritual could be not only a powerful charm but equally a potential weapon. One American partisan cheerfully reported the Democrats's beat meeting in his town of Fulton. The gathering was small, he claimed, and the chairman "expressed an opinion after their adjournment *that their chief speaker 'was a Know Nothing'*--They distrust each other & are low down in spirits generally. They are very much puzzled to make out a ticket & they are very fearful that they will nominate K.N.s."³⁶ At least one

³⁵ J. F. H. Claiborne to John A. Quitman, Nov. 25, 1855 and Feb. 3, 1856 (quote), Quitman Family Papers, folders 7 and 8, respectively, MDAH.

³⁶ D. W. Owen to Charles D. Fontaine, May 14, 1855, Fontaine Papers, folder 10, MDAH. Owen's letter likewise expressed the antipartyism of many Know Nothings: "The great American movement now shaking the throne of Demagoguism & causing Placemen & Spoils-seekers to *tremble*." (All emphasis original.)

Democrat noted with satisfaction that the new party could be caught in its own trap. "The Know Nothings find themselves in the same situation [now] in which they placed us at the outset," wrote Wiley Harris, "[t]hey don't know who to rely upon."³⁷ This sort of apprehension and indecision had never characterized Mississippi politics, and it helped force both parties into nominating for every office.

Know-Nothing editors also played up the organization's mysterious qualities, by continuously planting doubts among Democrats. In Wilkinson County, American editor Levi S. Robertson described Woodville's Democratic meeting, as being pervaded by a "spirit of luke-warmness." "We are not positive," Robertson commented disingenuously, "that 'Sam' was looking on with complacency. But from the easy spirit of don't-care-a-centativeness manifested, by persons present, we should say that it was a 'mightily mixed' crowd." Robertson wanted Democrats to think there were Know Nothings lurking around--whether or not the suggestion was true. Another American editor reported the Democratic meeting in Holmes County. Its president, she said, expressed his fear that some delegates appointed to the state convention might be Know Nothings. "The very thought made him desperate, and he cried out 'if there are any among you Know Nothings, for Heaven sake stand up and let it be known.' None rose, and so he don't know 'em yet." Once again,

³⁷ Wiley P. Harris to J. F. H. Claiborne, Aug. 30, 1855, Claiborne Collection, box 2, folder 3, MDAH.

editor Harriet Prewett may or may not have known if any Know Nothings infiltrated the meeting, but why admit it?--better to let Democrats stew over it.³⁸

A great deal of the Democrats's uncertainty and confusion resulted from local elections held in late 1854 and early 1855. In several towns, Know Nothings swept into office by making secret agreements to support fellow members of the order. As Reuben Davis later remembered: "Men who were not even candidates were elected to office against popular candidates whose race was expected to be a walk-over."³⁹ One editor claimed (mistakenly) that Vicksburg's Spring 1855 municipal election was the first in Mississippi to involve Know Nothing. Democrats charged that the successful candidates were all members of "a new club" who won by larger margins than usual. The winning mayoral candidate, incumbent Robert Byrne, responded that the "Anti-Know Nothing, Anti-Tolerance, and Anti-Proscriptive" party initiated the unusual activity by campaigning against him for the first time. Within the state's anti-party political culture, neither side wanted to be fixed with the accusation of partisanship.⁴⁰ In Canton, Democratic editor Owen Van Vactor intimated that Know Nothings controlled the December, 1854 election for selectmen. When reporting the results in 1855 (including his own victory), he sneeringly referred to "Sam's surprising victory" the year before. Two years later, even

³⁸ *The Fort Adams Item*, April 14, 1855, see also the editorial "Who Knows" of May 5, 1855; *The Weekly American Banner*, June 15, 1855.

³⁹ Reuben Davis, *Recollections of Mississippi and Mississippians* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co.: The Riverside Press, 1889), 345.

⁴⁰ *Yazoo City Weekly Whig*, April 20, 1855.

as the Americans's power dwindled, they still managed to retake Canton's town government. "A hundred Democrats have been [ignominiously] defeated," griped the editor, "by some fifty Knownothings."⁴¹ The secret order's unexpected victory in 1854 put Democrats on guard.

The effect of Know-Nothing tactics was again evident in Yazoo City, where "new men" controlled both the town council and school board after elections in April, 1855. Anti-Democratic leader Harriet Prewett admitted that the "startling results of the late Municipal election" had evoked complaints of "midnight conspirators" from the party of Jackson. When the new town council selected her as official city printer, she accepted in typical Know-Nothing fashion. "We have called on some of the new Board," Mrs. Prewett said, "but they don't *Know Nothing* about it." The town's new school board similarly surprised many residents. Defeated incumbent School Board Commissioner M. D. Haynes wondered how the "old citizens, gentlemen who have resided here always" could be "cast aside" for "a new set of men--men little identified with the school and its prosperity."⁴² In Yazoo City, then, the Know Nothings had sparked a partisan alignment in municipal politics for the first time.

The two parties continued squabbling over control of the town in 1856. In March the American party held a city convention and made open nominations for mayor and selectmen in each ward. Evidently responding to criticism from local townsmen, editor

⁴¹ *The Commonwealth*, Dec. 1, 1855; March 6, 1857.

⁴² *Ibid.*, April 13, 1855.

Prewett maintained the efficacy of such a plan: "It is useless for the luke warm to say that it is not a political election." The Democrats, she claimed, "are making a party question of it. They say that if they carry the election in Yazoo City, the County is lost to the Americans." Once again, each side accused the other of bringing partisanship into previously non-partisan politics. The Americans carried their man J. H. Lawrence into the Mayor's chair, as well as capturing all four Council seats from the first ward, and three out of four in the second. Mrs. Prewett was again named city printer.⁴³ She had been chosen for the same office when still a Whig, even though the Board included a majority of men known to be Democrats--further evidence that it was the Know Nothings who initiated partisanship in municipal politics, including patronage.

Like voters in Canton and Yazoo City, the general election returns from numerous counties indicated that in 1855 many Mississippians, for the first time, placed party loyalty ahead of neighborhood ties. This startling development was most evident in contests for county officers. Not only did the parties make nominations, thereby limiting the traditionally chaotic array of candidates, but voters clearly responded to these partisan identifications. Marshall County's returning officer signalled a new reality when, for the first time, he arranged the vote totals for each office in two opposing columns (Table 7-1). In earlier contests that included multiple candidates for each post no one made any attempt to organize the returns. Where precinct totals survived, the new force of partisanship became even more evident.

⁴³ *The Weekly American Banner*, March 14, 28, April 11 and 18, 1856.

The races for circuit clerk and treasurer in Carroll County demonstrated the impact of Know-Nothing organization. In each case, both the county-wide and precinct totals matched almost exactly, both to one another and to the votes for governor (the party "base line").⁴⁴ Thus, unlike earlier elections in which similar county totals gave the mistaken impression of party influence (Figures 4-1 through 4-5), in this case the precinct totals reflected complete partisan loyalty (Table 7-2 and Figure 7-1). In other words, voters extended their partisan identification to these county candidates, rather than each neighborhood backing its own favorite son. In Yazoo County, races for probate clerk, circuit clerk, and probate judge showed similar continuity (Figure 7-2).⁴⁵

⁴⁴ The totals for assessor also matched, while the races for ranger and surveyor had only one candidate each. There was an error in recording totals for the sheriff's race, which made comparisons impractical.

⁴⁵ Like the figures in Chapter III, these trace the percentage of votes cast for the winning candidate in each race and in each precinct. Thus, lines that parallel one another indicate consistent partisanship.

Figure 7-1

Carroll County, 1855: Governor, Circuit Clerk, Treasurer

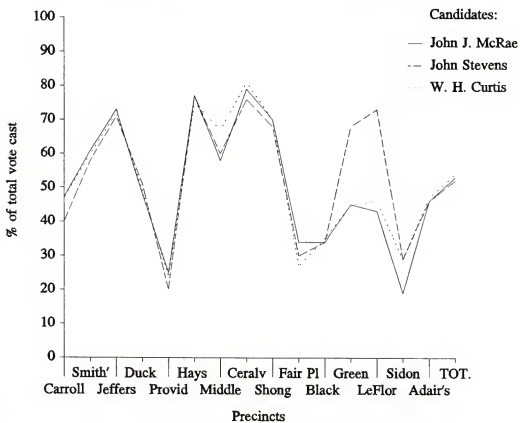
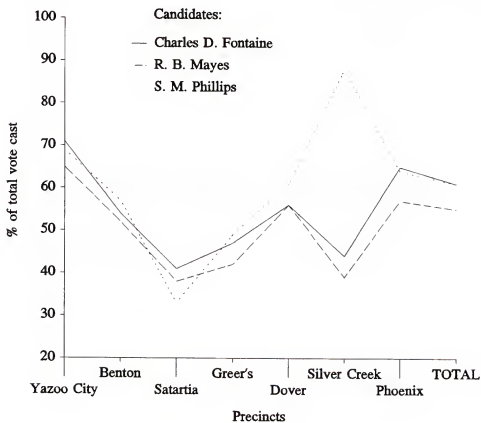


Figure 7-2

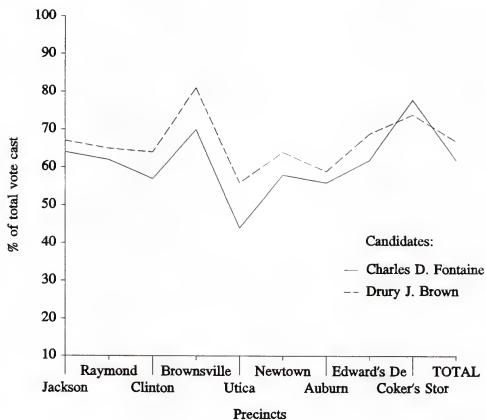
Yazoo County, 1855: Governor, Probate Judge, Circuit Clerk



The effect of Know-Nothing strategy on county politics varied, of course. Some counties showed little change from earlier patterns of nonpartisanship. In Hinds, only the contest for sheriff appeared to turn on partisan loyalty (Figure 7-3), although even that represented a sharp departure from the 1853 election. The lack of precinct-level data from most counties and the inconsistent figures in those with detailed returns caution us that any conclusions about statewide patterns remain tentative. Despite those reservations, however, it is clear that voters responded differently to the Know Nothings than to either the Whigs or Democrats. Both newspapers and election returns indicated that the new party had a major impact on county and local politics in 1855. By making formal nominations, the Know Nothings violated customary patterns and made networks of "friends and neighbors" much less important; whether or not this new practice would constitute a lasting change was problematic.

The 1856 presidential campaign energized Mississippi Know Nothings, like their brethren across the South, to support Millard Fillmore. The ex-president remained popular among southerners for his support of the Compromise of 1850. In the North, most Know Nothings broke with the national organization and supported Republican free soiler John C. Fremont. Fillmore ran well in much of the South, including Mississippi, where he captured over 40 percent of the votes. The disintegration of a national Know-Nothing organization, under the weight of sectional issues, had a predictably deleterious effect on the party in Mississippi. Enthusiasm slackened, many voters drifted back to their customary networks and the experiment with a real partisan culture seemed in jeopardy.

Figure 7-3
Hinds County, 1855: Governor and Sheriff



The state elections in 1857 registered falling support for the American party, whose gubernatorial candidate William Yerger fared worse than any anti-Democratic candidate ever had.⁴⁶ This poor showing further sapped the partisan fervor displayed by Americans in 1855. A new state law, enacted after the 1855 elections, decreed that voters would choose all judicial and county officers in even-numbered years, beginning in 1858. With this extra year to mope, the American party organization withered even more.⁴⁷ But when the 1858 campaign finally geared up, many local activists tried to revive the partisan intensity of 1855. Democrats in particular, led by the state organ in Jackson, urged nominations for all district and county offices. The ensuing debate demonstrated again that Know Nothings had prompted the changed political culture of 1855, while the lukewarm response to nominations signalled a decline in the new-found spirit of partisanship. The organizational impulse, though, survived in a few counties that made formal nominations, although voters showed only wavering support.

As early as February, 1858 the editors of *The Mississippian*, echoing Democrats from several counties, began lobbying for regular nominations. In March they warned

⁴⁶ He actually ran under the title of "Opposition," and not American Party. See Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South*, 271; Ross, "Dying Hard, Dying Fast," 224-229.

⁴⁷ The state legislature was still chosen in 1857, and Know Nothings had trouble fielding candidates in every county, and some ran simply as "Independents." See for example *The Weekly Panola Star*, July 15, 1857 (and throughout the campaign). Another indication was the disposition of Know-Nothing newspapers. In Okolona, *The Prairie News* changed its masthead from "An American Newspaper . . ." to "A Weekly Newspaper . . ." in July, 1858. See also Rawson, "Party Politics in Mississippi," 228-233.

fellow partisans against their opponents's seeming apathy and professed intention to eschew partisanship. That was simply a feint, they claimed, for a secret plan to unite on fellow Know Nothings and exploit the typical disorganization of county politics. With several Democrats running for each post, their minority opponents would have no trouble seizing victory. Nominations would solve all the Democrats's problems, they pleaded, and ensure the majority party got its rightful share of all offices.⁴⁸ At least one Opposition newspaper reacted with predictable concern of a minority and denounced the call for "proscriptive" nominations. The whole plan, said John Richardson, "looks to us like a small way of doing things, or rather a large way of doing small things."⁴⁹

Protests such as those from editor Richardson sparked an outcry from angry Democrats. In Noxubee County, Democrats submitted nominations for each local office (although some delegates objected) and addressed the complaints of local Know Nothings who criticized a proscriptive policy designed to shut them out. William S. Barry averred that it "was not for the opposition to complain" since the Know Nothings had nominated "clear down to constable" in 1855. "It was not for them to reject the chalice of their own preparation," he concluded. The delegates then proceeded to nominate for sheriff, treasurer, assessor and probate clerk. Another Democrat similarly scolded Know Nothings who wanted no partisanship in the upcoming elections. Three years before, he claimed, the Americans had enjoyed a majority and brought parties into every election. Now, "our

⁴⁸ *The Mississippian*, Feb. 17 and Mar. 10, 1858.

⁴⁹ *The Prairie News*, Feb. 25, 1858.

Knownothing [sic] friends . . . are . . . preaching what they do not practice under circumstances favorable to the election of their own partizans." In short, Know Nothings brought this on themselves by making partisanship the test for success and thus they better not complain if the Democrats responded in kind.⁵⁰ According to *The Mississippian*, Democrats in Harrison, Tishemingo and Lafayette similarly made some county nominations, although none, apparently, extended the practice to precinct officers (as the Know Nothings had).⁵¹

The experience of Madison County after 1855 likewise demonstrated that the newfound rivalry of Democrat versus Know Nothing lingered in some places. In November 1857 the local Democratic editor urged his flock to support William M. C. Jones for the Board of Police (in a special election). "Let no Democrat stay at home on Monday next, if he is anxious for the ascendancy of his party in the county," he warned. "A defeat in this District will be hailed as the resurrection of Know-Nothingism." This seat represented the only Democratic one on the current Board of Police (elected in 1855), and although their party controlled the recent gubernatorial election, the editor still feared Know-Nothing intrigues. When Jones easily defeated William C. Love, Democrats hailed it as a party triumph, while Know Nothings claimed that their man refused to canvass the district.⁵² The Board of Police remained the focus of Democratic interest in 1858. They

⁵⁰ *Jefferson Journal*, Sept. 13, 1858; see also Feb. 26 and Mar. 19.

⁵¹ *Kemper Democrat*, Apr. 8, 1858; *The Mississippian*, Apr. 14, June 9 and 23, 1858.

⁵² *The Commonwealth*, Nov. 14 and 28, 1857.

accused the "Know-Nothing Board" of mismanaging the Court House renovations, general malfeasance and "foul favoritism" toward political cronies. While disputes over Board politics had raged for years (see chapter Five), the focus on partisanship was new. Throughout the 1858 campaign, editor Owen Van Vector hammered at the Know-Nothing-controlled Board and its policies, led by president Nathan B. Whitehead.⁵³

Some Madison Democrats called for county nominations as early as January, in order to forestall another Know-Nothing triumph. The Americans, claimed one Democrat, will certainly complain about "proscriptive policies," but at the same time "sneak to some midnight meeting in a culvert and nominate for all offices from Congress to constable." Editor Van Vector added that county nominations represented "fighting the devil with fire" since their opponents surely will make secret agreements, as they did in 1855. In early February the Democrats nominated men for several offices, but failed to agree on others, including the prestigious posts of sheriff and treasurer.⁵⁴ Many Democrats objected to county nominations, preferring the pre-1855 pattern of neighborhood networks: why bother with parties when one could support a friend or neighbor who was known personally? Thus, in early March local partisans agreed to hold a "ratification meeting," which they called to decide the efficacy of nominations. "We are all, without exception, the more inclined to this course," admitted one delegate, "as some considerable division

⁵³ *Ibid.*, Dec. 12, 1857; Mar. 13, Mar. 20, Apr. 10 and Aug. 21, 1858. The last issue discussed the Board's attempts to gerrymander its districts to benefit President Whitehead. It evidently failed to work, Whitehead lost in 1858 after several successive terms.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Jan. 14 and 30, Feb. 6 and 13, 1858.

existed in the last meeting in regard [to] the propriety of making nominations at all." Van Vactor concurred: he would rather scrap nominations than divide the party.⁵⁵ The editor did not mention the March 8 ratification meeting, and made few comments regarding county offices throughout the campaign. As late as October 2, one candidate for probate judge avowed that "no meeting, called for the purpose of making nominations, was at all likely to represent the views of the party."⁵⁶

Election returns in 1858 reflected this indecision among Democrats. Although most races had only two candidates, hinting at party influence, the vote totals showed little relationship to one another (Figure 7-6). Only the contests for sheriff and circuit clerk revealed any consistency. By 1860, the totals indicated a more complete return to the "politics of neighborhood," as one candidate tended to dominate each voting precinct (Figure 7-8).⁵⁷ The progression of Madison county elections between 1851 and 1860 trace the dramatic, if short-lived impact of Know Nothingism (Figures 7-4 through 7-8).⁵⁸

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Feb. 20 and 27, Mar. 6, 13 and 27, 1858. The Democrats's language again indicated that Know Nothings had initiated county nominations: "Still they tell us [in 1858], that party ought to have nothing to do with our county and municipal election. Such was not their language when they had the majority: then party was every thing [sic]" (Feb. 27).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Oct. 2, 1858.

⁵⁷ See especially the votes for assessor and coroner. The Opposition editor of *The American Citizen* likewise indicated the failure of party organization when he commented on the voters's lack of enthusiasm for nominating conventions, especially "in the case of county offices" (Oct. 8, 1860).

⁵⁸ I did not find any precinct-level data for 1853.

Figure 7-4
Madison County, 1851: Governor, Sheriff, Circuit Clerk

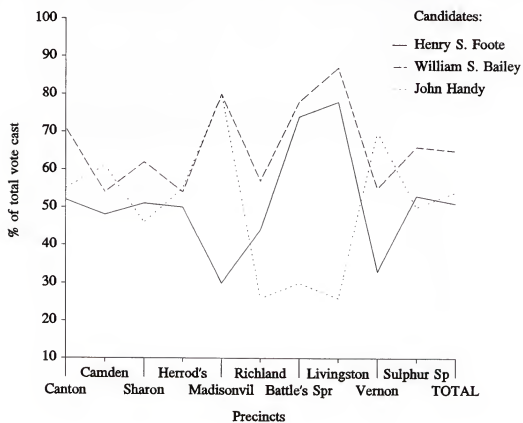


Figure 7-5
Madison County, 1855: Governor, Sheriff, Probate Clerk

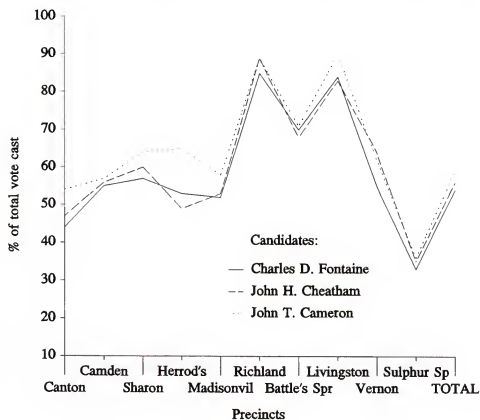


Figure 7-6

Madison County, 1858: Sheriff, Treasurer, Probate Clerk

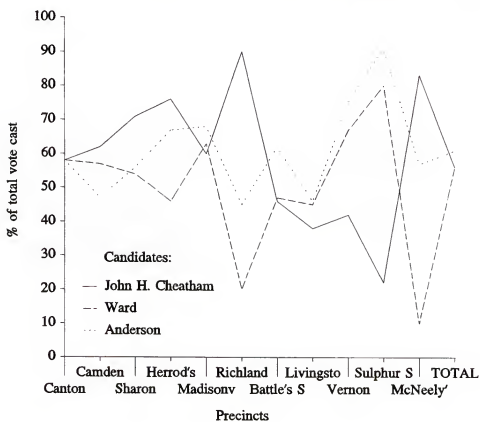


Figure 7-7
 Madison County, 1858: Sheriff and Circuit Clerk

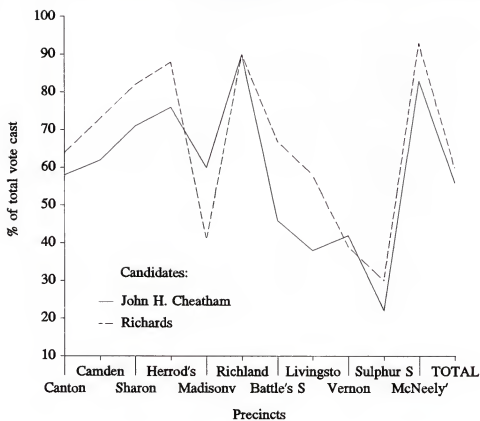


Figure 7-8
Madison County, 1860: Sheriff and Surveyor

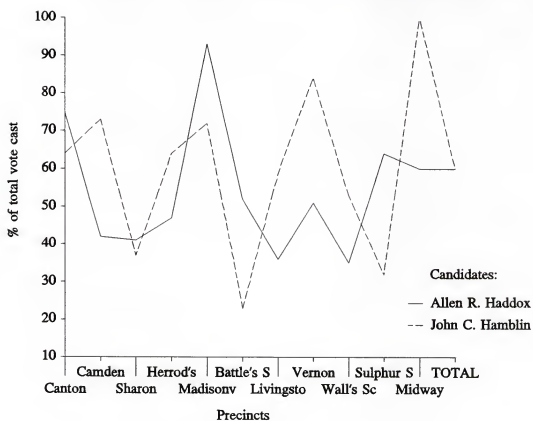
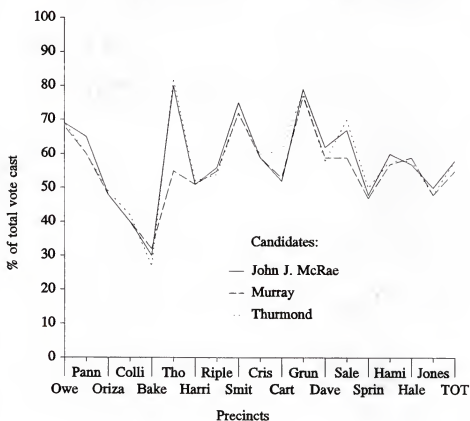


Figure 7-9
Tippah County, 1855: Governor, Sheriff, Circuit Clerk



The chain of events in Tippah County likewise summarized the upheaval, but ultimate failure of Know Nothings to effect lasting change in the political culture. The 1853 elections produced a typically chaotic situation at the county level. There were multiple candidates for probate clerk, treasurer and assessor, and the two-man contests for ranger and coroner ended in lopsided victories.⁵⁹ Two years later both the Democrats and Know Nothings made nominations for every county office and the Board of Police. Precinct-level returns indicated a nearly perfect party vote for every office (Figure 7-9).⁶⁰ In 1855, then, politics in Tippah County demonstrated a rigid adherence to partisanship that had superseded personal and family networks.

Before the next elections in 1858 the fate of county politics remained unclear. Sparked by suggestions for a Democratic convention to nominate a candidate for sheriff, several correspondents debated county nominations in the local newspaper. All the writers agreed that only a small minority of party members attended primary meetings, which always gave nominations the "feeling" of inequity, dominated by wire-pulling caucus managers. Despite this persistent problem, "Anti-Mulligrubs" still favored county nominations to insure victory for the majority Democrats. The others, however, argued that county offices were not "political," and favored the customary practice of supporting men known to them and thus known to be "capable, faithful and honest." The correspondent "Tippah" explained further: conventions, he said, remained unpopular

⁵⁹ I did not find precinct totals for Tippah County in 1853 or 1858.

⁶⁰ *The Ripley Advertiser*, Nov. 15 and 29, 1855.

among all voters in the county and Democrats could "only be induced to support the nominees at all, only for political positions." Insisting on county nominations simply would alienate too many of the rank and file and undermine what fragile loyalty existed.⁶¹

Another of the debaters testified to the unusual situation in 1855. "I have been a voter since 1841, never failed to vote in my life, never gave for political offices any but a democratic vote," he averred, "but once have I been called on by my party to vote for a nominee for Sheriff ... and that was in 1855, and you well remember the peculiar circumstances which forced the party to nominate that year." He went on to suggest that a convention would simply disrupt the party for no good purpose, destroying its chances of success in the following year's state elections. Instead, party leaders should allow voters to support their friends and neighbors as they have always wanted and done.⁶² In short, Know Nothings forced Democrats to extend partisanship, against their custom and the wishes of ordinary voters, but the crisis had passed and it was time to re-establish the politics of neighborhood.

Finally, several of the men hinted at the growing sectional discord, the coming crisis between North and South, and the need for Southern unity. "I ask what good would a convention do? Would it tend to unite us as one people? Would it give us more confidence in Southern institutions?" The same writer continued: "For the time is coming when we must be one so far as it regards our institutions. If that is so, why should we keep

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, Mar. 3 and 24 (quote), 1858.

⁶² *Ibid.*, Mar. 24, 1858.

up strife about civil offices?" Another resident agreed. "[I]t matters little whether the Sheriff be a whig or democrat, or know nothing or know something, provided he is a true southern man."⁶³ The importance of sectional issues therefore, helped to undermine the development of competitive party organizations. The elections in 1858 looked like Tippah's pre-1855 experience: five candidates for probate clerk, treasurer and surveyor, four for sheriff, six for ranger, and eighteen for assessor.

Further proof that Know Nothings forced the issue of nominations in 1855 was the experience of Jefferson County in 1858, particularly the race for District Attorney. For that office, Democratic leaders decided on a special nominating convention to mediate among their several candidates. The "obnoxious precedent" of nominations for judicial officers, admitted editor Henry Baker, was unfortunate. But "the instinctive law of self-preservation demands that Democra[ts]" organize, to protect themselves against their "entrenched" opponents. The Know Nothings, he maintained, demand absolute "political fidelity" and thus concentrate on a single candidate. One hopeful Democrat, John S. Holt, withdrew before the convention preaching party unity and wishing to head off any movement toward judicial nominations. Another long-time Democrat admitted that voters in his county remained "averse to such things" as conventions, and feared their wrath if he got too involved with this one. In the convention, editor Baker's man, L. M. Lee, captured the nomination but eventually lost the election.⁶⁴

⁶³ *Ibid.*, see also May 12, 1858.

⁶⁴ *Jefferson Journal*, Sept. 6, 13, and 20, 1858. Hiram S. Van Eaton to William Nicholas Whitehurst, Sept. 10, 1858, W. N. Whitehurst Papers, MDAH, box 1, folder

After Lee's defeat, Baker blamed Democrats disgusted with conventions and nominations. Many partisans, the editor admitted, "voted for [J. B.] Patton professedly as an administration of rebuke upon a party that would mingle politics and the judiciary." He also acknowledged that party politics played no role in any race except that for District Attorney. "[O]ne's own success rested upon the number of his friends; and the disappointed cannot consistently upbraid a citizen voter for having loved his rival and successful opponent more."⁶⁵ Thus, in Jefferson County only a special convention engineered by Democratic leaders could stir up partisan feelings, some of which backfired against them when voters apparently voiced their typical distrust and hatred of party machinery or organization. As elsewhere, the unusual intensity of 1855 simply failed to survive until the next election.

In other counties, Democrats made nominations but had little success with voters, most of whom decided to ignore parties and again practice neighborhood politics. Men in Harrison County, who supported the Democratic nominee for governor in 1857 by a whopping 450 to 88 margin, spurned the party's choices for sheriff and circuit clerk. They did, however, provide narrow victories in three other races for surveyor, assessor and treasurer. Predictably, the Opposition press lampooned such dubious success: "they put up a clean ticket from Judge down to Surveyor," but "the result has been a complete

7. See also the letters of July 20 and Aug. 18, 1858, both of which discuss the District Attorney's race, possibility of convention, and chances for success among rival candidates.

⁶⁵ *Jefferson Journal*, Oct. 11, 1858. See also the *Natchez Daily Courier*, Oct. 12, 1858.

fizzle." In Tishomingo another Democratic stronghold, the party's nominees lost three out of five contested elections, including the prestigious sheriff's race.⁶⁶

After the 1858 elections, Democrats admitted the failure of nominations, but reasserted their basic utility for a majority party. "Notwithstanding the reverses in several instances where Democratic nominations were made for county officers . . . we are gratified to note that our friends are not discouraged by the result." The editor of the *Mississippi Democrat* likewise encouraged his fellow partisans to agitate for a more complete organization and use of nominating conventions in the 1860 elections. Finally, another Democrat confessed that a county convention remained a divisive issue among his neighbors. "We found some ardent convention Democrats, and some as violently opposed," he concluded, and "thought it advisable not to make any suggestion" of a convention this year.⁶⁷ Thus, while many editors and some party activists favored local nominations, most voters seemed to prefer the pre-Know Nothing style of politics.

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The advent of Know-Nothing secret organization produced a temporary revolution in Mississippi's antiparty political culture. In 1855 for the first and only time, most voters followed the dictates of party loyalty rather than personal acquaintanceship. Allowed to develop, this new intensity could have produced a meaningful partisan system in

⁶⁶ *The Mississippian*, June 9 and Aug. 11, 1858; *Natchez Daily Courier*, Oct. 12, 1858. Democrats in Noxubee and Lafayette also made some nominations (although not a complete slate), but I failed to find election returns.

⁶⁷ *The Mississippian*, Oct. 27, 1858; *Mississippi Democrat* and *Kemper Democrat*, both quoted in *The Mississippian*.

antebellum Mississippi. But when sectional issues broke up the national party in 1856, Mississippi Know Nothings lost enthusiasm and their organization withered. Most voters evidently abandoned their newly discovered taste for parties in response to growing sectionalism--the South needed unity--and because their natural antipartyism reasserted itself. Furthermore, the Know Nothings no longer seemed like a radical departure from "business as usual," but looked more and more like a typical political party. By 1857 the American party was weak and ineffective at the state level, and the following year made no attempt to press nominations in county elections. Moreover, by that point Republican free soil rhetoric had succeeded in uniting Mississippians behind their sacred institutions and cherished ethics. Like the crisis of 1850-51, Southern men challenged each other to stand up "as men" and defend their communities. In a political world defined by neighborhood loyalties and face-to-face relationships, the language of honor and manliness would be an explosive combination.

TABLE 7-1
Marshall County, 1855

For Governor John J. McRae	1228	For Governor Charles D. Fontaine	1192
For Representatives T. J. Hudson	1251	For Representatives P. T. Scruggs	1175
James L. Autry	1248	John W. C. Watson	1198
J. W. Clapp	1247	Thomas Powell	1210
Thos. L. Dunlap	1261	William W. Wallace	1186
For Sheriff John R. M. Carroll	1271	For Sheriff Benjamin L. Milano	1155
For Coroner John Brown	1260	For Coroner J. M. D. Edgar	1181
For Probate Judge Christopher H. Mott	1233	For Probate Judge Nathaniel W Williams	1210
For Probate Clerk John Trousdale	1271	For Probate Clerk Harvey Scott	1181
For Assessor Thomas H. Smith	1271	For Assessor H. S. Rodgers	1204
For County Treasurer Walter B. Sorrells	1232	For County Treasurer Jesse Lewillen	1197
For County Ranger Lewis B. Johnson	1248	For Ranger William B. Kirby	1189
For Circuit Clerk Joseph O. Walker	1228	For Circuit Clerk Benjamin Moss	1217

Some of the "Opposing Candidates" were placed out of order, and I have rearranged them so each office is on the same line. The actual returns, in other words, were not this orderly.

TABLE 7-2
Carroll County, 1855

	Governor		Circuit Clerk		Treasurer	
	McRae	Fontaine	Stevens	Young	Curtis	Marshall
TOTAL	885	792	864	798	890	765
Carrollton	203	228	173	261	206	230
Smith's Mills	64	81	50	43	60	45
Jefferson	74	27	72	29	73	28
Duck Hill	58	42	61	59	59	61
Providence	10	30	8	32	9	28
Hays Creek	53	16	54	16	50	17
Middleton	80	58	81	53	92	46
Ceralvo	83	22	80	25	85	20
Shongalo	97	42	92	44	95	46
Adairs	31	30	81	30	31	35
Fair Play	26	50	23	54	21	56
Black Hawk	47	90	46	90	47	87
Sidon	6	25	9	22	9	22
Greenwood	40	49	55	26	40	40
Point LeFlore	12	16	19	7	13	15

CHAPTER 8

VIOLENCE, HONOR, AND THE POLITICAL CULTURE OF SECESSION

The anomaly of Know Nothingism, between 1855 and 1857, was the singular (and only partial) exception to Mississippi's antiparty political culture, for two or three years many voters seemed to profess an intense devotion for one party or the other. But voting returns and contemporary observers indicated that by 1858 parties were again ineffective in most contests, where men preferred to rely on community networks of friends and neighbors. Two years later, the regularly scheduled elections of 1860 and the special contest for secession convention delegates, held in December of that year, both indicated a return to customary patterns. At the same time, the sectional controversy reached a climax as public opinion in the North united behind the Republican party's free soil, anti-Southern platform. In Mississippi, community leaders invariably called upon the passionate rhetoric of manliness and honor when they interpreted these northern "insults." This volatile combination of personal politics, face-to-face speechmaking, and the highly charged language of honor proved to be fateful. Once Mississippi's voters defined the rise of Republicanism as an insult to individual and community honor, they could not fail to seek satisfaction. As southern men of honor they took the affront personally, conditioned by years of personal politics unfiltered by the depersonalizing buffer of anonymous partisanship. Any insult to personal honor was likewise an affront to one's community

because that was where status was confirmed (the community would be shamed since they had confirmed your honor in the first place). Conversely, when Republicans questioned the moral turpitude of the South as a whole, it affected men's personal honor—if the community was not honorable, then one's sanctioned claim would be undermined.¹ As in 1850-51, Mississippians complained most often of the moral insult of free soil, which denigrated them as second-class citizens. The difference, however, was the Republican party and its rapid ascendancy in the North. Unlike the earlier crisis, this time the vast majority of Mississippi's men believed that northern criticism demanded satisfaction; they responded with anger and eventually with violence.

*

Throughout the antebellum period, Mississippi politics reflected the culture of honor and violence in which it operated. The state's reputation for killing was legendary: in 1854, more men died violently in Mississippi than in all six New England states combined (although they had five times the population). Newspapers routinely included accounts of interpersonal violence, expressing little shock or surprise. "An affray occurred in this city on Monday last, between G. W. Morton and S. L. Lewis," the editors of

¹ The connection between individual and community is particularly high in rural, honor-bound societies. (See also the discussion in Chapter Two.) Conversely, in atomistic modern America, group identity is low. See Robert E. Lane, *Political Ideology: Why the American Common Man Believes What He Does* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962). "[T]he personal, individual identity of the [contemporary] common man is relatively strong, though curiously objectified, while the social identity, the sense of self deriving from group membership, is pitifully weak. The weak, diffuse social identity of these men, we shall say, contributes to a diffuse, unconstructed political ideology" (382). This, of course, is precisely the opposite of 1850s Mississippi.

Aberdeen's *Sunny South* calmly reported. "The former escaped uninjured. The latter was severely wounded with a dirk knife."² Another observer, the Reverend James A. Lyon of Columbus, expressed his own distaste for such "routine" killings: "The reckless manner in which the sixth commandment, which forbids murder, is disregarded in this community, is truly alarming." But the real problem, Lyon argued, was that the community accepted the violence so readily, mainly because the social elite committed much of it themselves. If "these murders were committed by vagabonds and the scum of society . . . [the] moral effect would not be so injurious to society," the Reverend preached. "But . . . men of fair standing in society, received and regarded as gentlemen, are the perpetrators of the butcheries."³

² Reported in *The Prairie News*, Mar. 10, 1859. Historian Dickson D. Bruce has emphasized southerners' willingness to accept such high levels of violence. "Far more striking [than the actual number of killings], historically speaking at least, was the overwhelming acceptance of violence by almost everyone in society." And: "But what made for a 'violent tenor' of Southern life--what made the South seem uniquely violent--was not only that violence seemed to occur often, but also that people there saw violence as unavoidable, as an essential fact of human life somehow built in, profoundly, to human relationships." Quoted in *Violence and Culture in the Antebellum South* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1979), 6, 7. See also Elliot J. Gorn, "'Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch': The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry," *American Historical Review* 90 (Feb. 1985): 18-43. "Recreations like cockfighting deadened men to cruelty, and the gratuitous savagery of gouging matches reinforced the daily truth that life was brutal, guided only by the logic of superior nerve, power, and cunning" (36).

³ *The Eagle*, June 1, 1855, quoted in Grady McWhiney, "Ethnic Roots of Southern Violence," in William J. Cooper, Jr., Michael F. Holt, and John McCardell, eds., *A Master's Due: Essays in Honor of David Herbert Donald* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 126.

That the southern states in general exhibited a far greater level of violence than the rest of the country has been well documented by historians. Explanations range from the presence of slavery to the availability of weapons, a frontier lifestyle or Celtic ancestry and the ancient code of honor. In 1880, historian H. V. Redfield calculated homicide rates for the antebellum and postbellum North and South. Comparing the old Southeast with New England and the new Southwest with the old Northwest, he discovered murder rates ten times as great among residents of "Dixie." Redfield identified several factors for the South's bloody past: an exaggerated sense of honor that prompted men to seek violent redress for any number of seemingly trivial insults; the ready availability of weapons, especially in the "frontierlike" southwest; weak institutional controls, including law enforcement; and, generally, a lack of regard for human life. All of these factors, of course, contributed something to the regional bloodletting--according to all estimates, Mississippi in the 1840s and 1850s was a dangerous place to live.⁴

⁴ H. V. Redfield, *Homicide, North and South* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1880). Studies that examine southern violence include John Hope Franklin, *The Militant South, 1800-1861* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), who emphasizes the region's "martial tradition"; Sheldon Hackney, "Southern Violence," *American Historical Review* 74 (Feb. 1969): 906-925; Raymond D. Gastil, "Homicide and a Regional Culture of Violence," *American Sociological Review*, 36 (June 1971): 412-427; Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., *Violence and Culture*; John Shelton Reed, "Below the Smith and Wesson Line: Southern Violence," in his *One South: An Ethnic Approach to Regional Culture* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1982): 139-153; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) and *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); and Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th-Century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

The dictates of honor, fueled in turn by an intensified male rivalry, added greatly to all this violence. Men struggling to assert their power and status, highly conscious of reputation and slurs to character and manhood responded quickly, and often violently to any perceived insults. Among "simple, ordinary" farmers, as historian Elliot Gorn has shown, violence usually took the form of "rough and tumble" fighting, a combination of wrestling and more gruesome eye-gouging. These battles, he argues, "grew out of challenges to men's honor--to their status in patriarchal, kin-based, small-scale communities--and were woven into the very fabric of daily life." Inevitable male rivalry, accentuated in small communities and magnified immeasurably by the pervasive power of honor, led to violence among all classes.⁵ Some local politicians, candidates for constable and justice of the peace, wrestled and gouged their way to prominence, demonstrating physical courage and "manliness" to the assembled community. As the supreme mark of status among poor men in rural Mississippi, this raw power was "the touchstone of masculinity."⁶

⁵ Elliot Gorn, "'Gouge and Bite,'" 21-22, 39-42. See also Tom Parramore, "Gouging in Early North Carolina," *North Carolina Folklore Journal* 22 (1974); and Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, esp. 25-61, and part three.

⁶ Gorn, "Gouge and Bite," 36. Gorn makes a similar argument for urban working-class culture in 1850s New York City. Among gangs of immigrant and native workers, "[m]en of the streets craved each other's esteem, needed each other's acknowledgment, for the identity of every man was intimately tied to his standing within an all-male peer group." This was, though, an "oppositional" and "marginalized" culture within the North's dominant evangelical culture that prized good manners and a "middle-class moral code." "'Good-Bye Boys: I Die a True American': Homicide, Nativism, and Working-Class Culture in Antebellum New York City," *Journal of American History*, 74 (Sept. 1987), 403, 406.

Street brawling could easily degenerate into a more deadly confrontation, and the line between "rough and tumble" gouging and ritualized dueling often seemed less than clear. As historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown noted, more duels between men not of "the first rank in society . . . probably took place than of the more celebrated variety between politicians and editors."⁷ In Yazoo City, one local editor described what might have been such an encounter. "A man by the name of Head and Mr. S. V. Stewart, Coroner and Deputy Sheriff, met on the street by appointment both armed with double-barreled guns. They advanced within a few feet of each other and both fired," she continued, "and Stewart received several balls in his heart, which killed him almost instantly." His assailant escaped. Editor Harriet Prewett's narrative indicated a number of factors at work. First, of the two men involved, "Head" was clearly not well known and most probably not a "gentleman" or member of the social elite. If he had been, the editor would have known, or someone would have made his position clear. Second, the "duel" did not take the form of a typical ritualized confrontation since the two men "advanced" toward one another before firing, although they did meet "by appointment," suggesting some planning or negotiation. Finally, that Stewart was a local politician and deputy sheriff suggests the affair might have resulted from these duties, or at least the editor implied such an explanation with her inclusion of the man's official status. Regardless of the cause, this

⁷ Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence*, 147.

incident testifies not only to the prevalence of violence, but also suggests that a sharp distinction between street fighting and dueling may be inaccurate.⁸

Brawling and gouging may have prevailed among the lower classes, and as the street fight in Yazoo City suggests, the difference between brawling and dueling was sometimes murky. Among "gentlemen," though, the preferred manner of proving one's manhood and honor was dueling. The extensive literature on dueling argues that the ritual encounter served a number of purposes for southern men. Most importantly, it defined the limits of who belonged among the elite; if challenged, one might refuse on the grounds that the challenger was "unworthy." Thus, dueling took place among equals, and as such established or maintained one's status in the community--anyone could brawl in the street, only the elite dueled according to code. It was, in short, "a means to demonstrate status and manliness among those calling themselves gentlemen, whether born of noble blood or not."⁹ Unlike brawling, in which the winner established his superiority over the vanquished and therefore his greater power or honor, the simple act of dueling conferred rank as a "gentleman."¹⁰

⁸ *The Weekly American Banner*, May 16, 1856. On "rough and tumble" fighting as the lower class' form of ritual conflict, see esp. Gorn, "Gouge and Bite," 41-42 and *passim*.

⁹ Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence*, 147.

¹⁰ On dueling see Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 350-361; Bruce, *Violence and Culture*, 21-43; Jack Kenny Williams, *Duelling in the Old South: Vignettes of Social History* (College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 1979); Stephen M. Stowe, "The Touchiness of the Gentleman Planter: The Sense of Esteem and Continuity in the Ante-Bellum South," *Psychohistory Review*, 8 (1979): 6-17; *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University

Gentlemen, then, preferred dueling as a means to resolve conflict and particularly to redress grievances, typically a slight to one's character or personal insult deemed too gross to ignore. Mississippi's Sargent S. Prentiss summarized the attitude of many contemporaries when he averred a general distaste for ritualized combat, yet believed it unavoidable "when a man is placed in a situation where if he does not fight, life will be rendered valueless to him, both in his eyes and those of the community."¹¹ Rather than a legal suit for slander, duelling was southerners' typically violent solution to the problem, and one which politicians resorted to perhaps more frequently than anyone else. Celebrated cases involving Henry Clay, John Randolph, Thomas Hart Benton and of course Andrew Jackson all testified to the potential for violence among national politicians, and it was perhaps even more common among men in state and local politics.

Most importantly, what duels between southern political figures signified was a common attitude toward politics and political rhetoric: southerners took it personally. For men of honor, anonymous insults could be ignored; in a political culture defined by parties, rhetoric would have been depersonalized. The problem, of course, was that Mississippians rejected parties as "the way politics was." Some editors and party loyalists grumbled about the voters' ambivalence and tried to make party organization the *sine qua non* of politics; many state and national politicians recorded consistent loyalty to parties.

Press, 1987), 1-49; and Kenneth Greenberg, "The Nose, the Lie, and the Duel in the Antebellum South," *American Historical Review* 95 (Feb. 1990), 57-74 and *Masters and Statesmen: The Political Culture of American Slavery* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 23-41.

¹¹ Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence*, 145.

But the voters' rhetoric and behavior testified to their ingrained antipartyism, a deeply held antipathy that rarely wavered throughout the 1840s and 1850s. This dominant attitude colored all political exchanges, particularly accentuating the significance and power of words.

Duels between editors, fistfights and even gunplay at barbecues, and more spectacular outbursts of violence punctuated this system of personal exchanges that characterized everyday political contact. Newspaper editors frequently resorted to the *code duello* in order to settle differences of opinion, engendered by rancorous articles and public commentary regarding the opposition. The tendency instead to level pistols at one another indicated again that politics in Mississippi was a highly personal affair. Furthermore, with little patronage to dispense, many editors apparently reasoned that personal loyalty to themselves was often the key to maintaining their network of close supporters as well as a more general following of readers.¹² Once again the dictates of honor proved decisive. Public insult demanded satisfaction between gentlemen, a worthy settlement that upheld personal honor and confirmed the manliness--in particular the physical courage--of those involved.

Duels between politicians and editors, then, were another indication of the state's prepartisan political culture. In order to maintain a loyal following and to demonstrate one's ability as a leader of men, politicians and editors, even more than other southerners needed to demonstrate their willingness to risk death for the sake of principle. This

¹² See Joanne Freeman, "Dueling as Politics: Reinterpreting the Burr-Hamilton Duel," (MS in author's possession).

requirement was only incumbent, of course, in a political world before parties--a series of highly personal relationships, played out in ritualized behavior before similarly honor-bound individuals. With the advent of effective, institutionalized parties, alliances became impersonal and leaders founded loyalty on networks of patronage. But dueling among politicians indicated the conflation of personal identification with political principles or rhetoric. As one recent student of dueling and politics summarized: "an attack on a political measure was an attack on an individual, and an attack on an individual demanded a personal defense."¹³ More than defending one's personal reputation, dueling also signified the assertion of leadership. When coming to the field of honor, politicians and editors staked a claim to political power and loyalty--it was a drama played out before one's admirers (or potential admirers), confirming physical courage and manliness as well as devotion to one's principles (reflected in the exaggerated, characteristic rhetoric).¹⁴

The relatively large number of people directly involved in duels, given wide publicity through newspaper coverage, reinforced the notion that the significance of dueling went beyond individual participants. Not only did men sometimes represent specific groups (for national politicians the identification was often parties, especially after

¹³ Freeman, "Dueling as Politics," 13, see esp. 6-14. See also Williams, *Dueling in the Old South*, 11-16. Williams paraphrases John Hope Franklin's comment that in Mississippi, "as late as 1850," one rarely achieved much political success without demonstrating his masculinity in a duel (16). See Franklin, *The Militant South*, 38, 50.

¹⁴ See esp. Freeman, "Dueling as Politics," 13-14: "When a politician defended his honor, he was defending his ability to claim political power, promoting himself and his 'particular friends' while dishonoring political rivals." And, "For politicians of the early republic [a prepartisan political culture], honor was thus much more than a vague sense of self-worth; it represented one's ability to prove oneself a deserving political leader."

the 1830s), but many others associated themselves with duelists through ties of neighborliness or blood relations.¹⁵ The clearest expression of this important function of dueling was the post-duel publication of "notes" or "exchanges" by both participants (or one of his close friends), explaining the origins of conflict and steps taken to resolve the difficulty. The point of these publications was to establish the correctness of one's behavior--strict adherence to the *code duello* but also both the manliness and restraint incumbent on "gentlemen" not to level pistols until all attempts at mediation had failed, and yet not to accept any insult that would tarnish reputation or claims to manhood and honor. Every ritual encounter, then, involved much more than two aggrieved individuals. Dueling was a public confrontation, designed as such, that confirmed a man's physical courage and force of will, and therefore his potential for social, or political leadership.¹⁶

These personal imperatives we typically associate with the "traditional" politics of the colonial era or, at the latest, the early republic. Mississippi in the 1850s, though, had a political culture still dependent on personal loyalties in which the great majority of voters despised institutional parties and rejected them utterly as the proper way to organize

¹⁵ See Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen*, 27: "the duel ... was less a private contest between two individuals than a clash that intimately involved large publics." This interpretation draws on the work of cultural anthropologists, revealed most clearly by Clifford Geertz in his famous description of the Balinese cockfight. See *Interpretation of Cultures; selected essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 412-453.

¹⁶ Many encounters, of course, never made it to the pages of local newspapers. Those involving national figures were much more likely to receive public attention. One suspects that duels involving local editors, for example, were widely discussed at the local store or tavern, on court day or during militia musters. In 1850s Mississippi, where the voting population in many counties remained small, the significance of political duels would become well known through word-of-mouth.

politics. It helps to explain the persistence of dueling among the state's politicians and editors. A dispute in 1858 between editors John Richardson and Benjamin F. Owen revealed some of the factors at work in political duels. It began when Richardson urged local candidates to announce themselves in his publication, *The Prairie News*, because it had "the largest circulation of any newspaper in the county." Owen, who ran the *Petrel* in nearby Houston, sarcastically disputed Richardson's claim as "presumptuous" and told his rival "Don't get *too smart*!"¹⁷ From that point it escalated, each editor disputing the other's claims and raising the stakes in a typical series of accusations and code words designed to provoke a challenge.

In *The Prairie News* of June 30 Richardson called Owen "a wilful, deliberate liar, and a mean, low-down cowardly slanderer," as well as a "base, pusillanimous puppy." In the language of honor and dueling, "liar" and "puppy" were two of the gravest insults, almost certain to instigate formal conflict. For his part, Owen responded in kind. In his *Petrel* on July 14 he labeled Richardson a "fool" and "a puppy and a liar," and finally a "consummate scoundrel." Owen, in fact, said he expected a "challenge instant[ly]," but rather than a "leaden" bullet, he claimed, Richardson sent back only "paper" bullets. In fact, Richardson naturally accepted the challenge and asked Owen (in a private communication) to meet him "as early as possible, at some convenient point out of the State, for reasons not necessary to be mentioned here." Thus, the exchange had proceeded

¹⁷ *The Petrel*, June 16, 1858, quoted in *The Prairie News*, July 22, 1858.

as a matter of course, each man employing the requisite insulting language that culminated in a formal challenge.

But at this point Owen balked. He decided not to fight, claiming that "I know nothing of the Duelling Code" and that should Richardson fall, "the laws of God, and my country would pronounce me a murderer." Owen's professed ignorance of the *code duello*, though, rang hollow. In his earlier editorials he had placed all the proper words--liar, coward, scoundrel, puppy--in italics, and even admitted that he expected Richardson "to demand our blood." Richardson, of course, seized on Owen's "cowardice" and exploited the whole affair in his own *Prairie News*, not only questioning Owen's manhood but also his fitness for leadership. "Now that I have proved him to be a liar and a poltroon, I feel somewhat satisfied," Richardson concluded, and noted that "Mr. Owen's funeral dirge, as a man of honor, as a gentleman, has been chanted, and I leave him to the scorn and contempt of an honest community." In short, Owen was a "white-livered coward" unworthy of respect and unwilling to stand behind his own words, hardly the man to inspire confidence as a leader, and something the "honest community" would at once recognize.¹⁸

Except for Owen's refusal to abide by the *code duello*, his controversy with Richardson was not unusual. Dueling was commonplace among Mississippi's editorial

¹⁸ July 22, 1858. In November Richardson was still celebrating his "victory" over Owen. "Saw our friend B. F. Owen, and spit in his face," he reported after a trip to Houston. "[W]e told him the depth to which we degraded him would prevent us paying any attention to him, unless 'twas to defend ourself from any personal attacks he might see proper to make; and if he desired to take satisfaction by abusing us, he could have an open field" (Nov. 11, 1858).

fraternity and newspapers often included a brief report of each encounter. "A duel was fought opposite Vicksburg on the 22d inst.," reported Richardson in *The Prairie News*, "between Maj. McCardle, editor of the True Southron, and Col. Partridge, editor of the Vicksburg Whig. Partridge was wounded in the ankle." Richardson likewise related an aborted duel a few months later. One of the participants was arrested on his way to the designated field and missed the scheduled time, prompting his opponent to refuse further hostilities, as provided under the *code duello*. The detained editor "became belligerent," called the other a "cowardly poltroon" and demanded satisfaction, but "the affair terminated without a fight. Each side published cards in the papers, and so it ended--honorably, perhaps, to both."¹⁹ On average, a duel between Mississippi editors or politicians that reached the field of honor appears to have been a monthly, if not more frequent occurrence.

Among the state's editors, the foremost duelist was recognized to be Dr. James Hagan of the *Vicksburg Sentinel*. Hagan, a doctor from Philadelphia, engaged in street fights as well as formal duels. He reportedly fought at least a half dozen duels during his tenure as editor and was eventually killed in 1843 by the son of a local Judge whom he disparaged in print. The *Sentinel*, in fact, had perhaps the most violent history of any partisan sheet in Mississippi. The local president of Vicksburg's Railroad Bank wounded reporter James Fall after an uncomplimentary story. Several years later, J. M. Downes shot editor T. E. Robins (Hagan's successor) in a duel, followed by a similar encounter

¹⁹ *The Prairie News*, July 29, 1858, Jan. 27, 1859.

between Downes's second and Robins's replacement Walter Hickey. Hickey fared better, killing his challenger outright. In the 1850s the violence continued. Editor James Ryan was killed by [Marmaduke Shannon], publisher of the competing *Vicksburg Whig*. Hickey, still writing for the paper, proved less successful in his second duel and was shot down, although he later recovered and moved to Texas, only to be killed there.²⁰ While not every newspaper had this bloody a history, every editor could expect to be challenged, at least, if not actually face pistol fire.

The possibility of violent confrontation always seemed to lurk near the surface of seemingly benign political encounters. One Mississippian, Reuben Davis, remembered local politics as a succession of "wild days of feasting, speech-making, music, dancing, and drinking, with, perhaps, rough words now and then, and an honest hand-to-hand fight when debate was angry and the blood hot."²¹ Davis himself contributed to the state's violent political history. During his 1853 campaign for Congress, he fought with opponent William Barksale in the middle of a Natchez street. The two men engaged in conversation that quickly turned to argument, and after a few minutes Barksdale struck Davis in the face. Enraged, Davis drew a knife and tried to stab the unarmed Barksdale, who did not back away. Fortunately for both men, Davis was apparently less talented with a dirk than

²⁰ Williams, *Dueling in the Old South*, 32-33, and Frederic Hudson, *Journalism in America* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1873), 762-64.

²¹ Reuben Davis, *Recollections of Mississippi and Mississippians* (Boston: The Riverside Press, 1889), 111.

as a lawyer. After some of his supporters bailed him out of jail, Davis continued the canvass undaunted.²²

On another occasion, routine debate among several Harrison County politicians nearly led to gunfire at an afternoon barbecue, indicating how quickly men turned from rhetoric to violence. It started at a Know-Nothing debate in Handsboro, late in October of 1855. One Know-Nothing speaker, [Isaac?] Martin claimed that President Thomas Jefferson had directed his Postmaster General to bar all foreigners from post office patronage (suggesting the Democratic party discriminated against the foreign-born, and therefore their rhetoric against the Know-Nothings's nativism was base hypocrisy). Democrat Robert Saffold, another speaker and candidate for state senator, asked Martin for proof of the allegation and Martin admitted he did not have a copy of the order. Two of Martin's fellow Know Nothings, including Saffold's senatorial opponent and current state representative Roderick Seal rose to defend their man Martin, chastised Saffold for interrupting the speech, and finally "declared that Saffold had given Martin the lie twice." This phrase--also known as "the lie direct"--signalled an opening move towards formal challenge. Lying meant dishonesty or "unmanly behavior." Saffold "denied having given Martin the lie . . . [and avowed] he did not intend to question his veracity, that he had only asked for proof as he had a right to do, without intending offence." This apparently satisfied Martin, who finished his speech after "order was restored."

²² See Cecil S. H. Ross, "Dying Hard, Dying Fast: The Know-Nothing Experience in Mississippi," Ph. D. diss., Notre Dame, 1982, 49-51.

Only a few minutes later, though, Saffold protested that Martin had exceeded his allotted time, a complaint overheard by Seal, who warned all those within earshot that if anyone interfered with his friend Martin again he would "deal with him." In response to an angry question from Saffold, Seal confirmed that those remarks were indeed meant for him (Saffold), and finally "gave Saffold the Damned Lie." This phrase indicated another step in the ascending language of challenges, an even worse accusation than "giving the lie twice." In response to Seal's "giving him the Damned Lie," Saffold proceeded to knock his opponent in the mouth and draw a loaded pistol, leveling it on the prostrated attorney. "When Seal was recovered and upon his feet, Saffold asked him if he was armed," and declared he "would not shoot an unarmed man." If Seal was armed (which was in fact the case), then he ought to draw his weapon, or alternatively he should "go and arm himself, that he Saffold was ready."²³

Ultimately, others on the scene apparently stopped the confrontation at this point and persuaded Seal and Saffold to settle their differences in the proper manner, outside the presence of women and children.²⁴ That these two men could come so near to firing at one another, over seemingly trivial comments, says much about Mississippi politics. Most importantly, the incident demonstrated the extent to which political rhetoric became

²³ The incident is outlined in a letter from Thomas J. Humphries to J. F. H. Claiborne, Nov. 15, 1855, Claiborne Collection, folder 20, Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH), Jackson, MS.

²⁴ I did not find evidence of an actual duel, although it seems hard to believe, after this beginning, that the two avoided one. In any case, the confrontation was not fatal. Seal was still practicing law in Biloxi in 1860, and Saffold attended the 1857 Democratic state convention in Jackson.

infused with personal honor. "Insults" such as Martin's offhand comment about the Democrats's attitude toward foreigners were taken personally by men like Robert Saffold. Political rhetoric was not the product of some anonymous organization--the profound, entrenched antipartyism colored most men's attitudes toward public discourse. Even though Saffold identified with the Democratic party, or at least one of its patriarchs in Thomas Jefferson, he still took Martin's remarks as a personal insult, provoking a confrontation and nearly gunfire with Roderick Seal.

Like the affair between Seal and Saffold many quarrels over politics failed, apparently, to reach the field of honor. In Natchez's *Mississippi Free Trader*, for instance, one writer recounted a duel in 1851 between state representatives Peter B. Starke of Bolivar County and Madison's C[hables] C. Shackleford. "The cause of the affair is stated to be an altercation in the House of Representatives," the editor wrote, "between those gentlemen, in reference to the Levee System." But the newspaper in nearby Vicksburg soon corrected its competitor. Although recent debates were at times heated, "they have occasioned nothing more serious than the 'unsheathing of blades and picking of flints' . . . There have been no visits to Louisiana [a favorite dueling spot for Mississippians]." ²⁵ Numerous disagreements that began with a formal challenge and could have resulted in gunfire, then, never reached the field of honor. These encounters still underscored the personal nature of political rhetoric and conflict. Starke and Shackleford evidently took some of the initial steps towards an actual duel--one party perceived an insult to his

²⁵ *The Vicksburg Sentinel*, Feb. 22, 1851.

character, a challenge was issued, notes exchanged--all of which resulted from a disagreement over potential levees on the Mississippi River. Like national politicians such as Clay and Jackson, Starke and Shackelford considered confronting one another as an appropriate way to resolve their differences and for the aggrieved party to get satisfaction.

Most of these disputes, involving both editors and politicians, grew out of editorials and articles about local issues or contests for office. Dr. James Hagan's death resulted from criticizing the local Judge, while James Fall's negative comments about the local bank brought him to the field. In 1859, editor Owen Van Vactor was shot down by one of the state's candidates for Congress. "An editorial article was the cause of the difficulty," reported another member of the press, "Mr. V.'s wound is severe, though not necessarily fatal."²⁶ Another editorial, repeating the claims of thousands of honor-bound southerners, explained why derogatory comments so often led to armed conflict, or at least the threat of violence. "To most [candidates], reputation is dearer than life itself," he lectured, "and ruthless attempts to tarnish or injure it, must necessarily endanger the peace and well being of society." Honor, in short, demanded satisfaction. This was particularly the case in Mississippi, the editor continued, because of everyone's "familiarity with the personal history of candidates." Therefore, "partisan presses should [not] be encouraged in the indulgence of the most wanton and violent vituperation and personal abuse of the

²⁶ *The Prairie News*, Aug. 25, 1859.

candidates presented to the people for their suffrages." No wonder, then, that editorial judgments often drove politicians and their accusers to the risk death.²⁷

Whether printed or spoken, words were decisive. As the difficulty between John Richardson and Benjamin Owen illustrated, certain terms carried the greatest offense: coward, liar, puppy, poltroon, scoundrel. Of course the deeper implication of these ritual words questioned one's manhood and masculinity, and for politicians in particular it cast doubt on their ability as leaders of other men.²⁸ Among "gentlemen," the printed word was often more important than spoken insults, as the number of duels resulting from editorials testified. But Mississippi, and the rest of the rural South, was still in large part an oral culture, driven by face-to-face, highly personal encounters between individuals. In oral cultures, there remains a fine boundary between talk and action; within the context of honor, words were powerful weapons, not to be used lightly.²⁹ Thus, insulting words--written or spoken--demanded satisfaction and usually meant violence, whether a gouging match in the mud or pistols at twenty paces.

²⁷ *Vicksburg Weekly Whig*, Oct. 22, 1851.

²⁸ On ritual words see Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence*, 142-152; and Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen*, 38.

²⁹ See esp. Gorn, "Gouge and Bite," 19, 27-28. He summarizes: "In oral cultures generally, and the Old South in particular, the spoken word was a powerful force in daily life, because ideation and behavior remained closely linked" (28). See also Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Bruce, *Violence and Culture*, 3-113; Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*; and McWhiney, "Ethnic Roots of Southern Violence," 129, 137.

The crucial factor that linked words with honor and violence, and drove men to seek satisfaction was their personal implication. Anonymous insults could be ignored; they were "unmanly" and indicated cowardice or base political motives.³⁰ Within those confines, partisan rhetoric should not have provoked such violent reactions. As the product of some unseen candidate or anonymous editorial, accusations, insults and all the inflammatory bombast of antebellum politics would scarcely have distressed men of honor. If Mississippians had embraced parties as the way politics operated, politicians and editors would not have resorted to the *code duello*--in an impersonal world insults offered as part of routine political discourse would have been shrugged off.

But they were not ignored. On the contrary, Mississippi politicians always considered party rhetoric as emanating from some individual accuser. Men in Mississippi simply did not conceive of politics in terms of party organization and impersonal bureaucracy. As such, they interpreted "offensive" political language as a personal affront, challenging one's character and reputation, and ultimately one's claim to masculinity. Contemporaries acknowledged this "flaw" in their political culture. One editor, trying unsuccessfully to convince voters of the benefits inherent in party organization, summed up the situation. "So long as the Convention [or party] system is [accepted], the candidate loses sight of himself and becomes the mere representative or exponent of a class of principles." If one loses, it is with the "honors of party" and "there is nothing personal in his defeat or triumph." But, the editor concluded, with candidates independent of party, "all is personal,

³⁰ See Etcheson, "Manliness and Political Culture," 68-70.

nothing but personal, and it is a miracle if it terminates otherwise than in hostilities."³¹ In short, parties would depersonalize political conflict.

It was from within this political tradition that men in the deep South measured the Republican party and its free soil, anti-Southern agenda. The great majority of Mississippians defined Republicanism as an insult that denied their equality in the nation and therefore denied their equal manhood with northerners. The language was essentially the same as in 1850-51 (see Chapter 2), but the much greater threat made the difference. Ten years earlier they confronted only the pitiful Free Soil party, now it was seemingly a whole section of the country. "Hitherto [before the Republican party] the South have little regarded the malicious and seditious ravings of the mad-capped fanatics," wrote editor Henry Baker of *The Fayette Watchtower*, but "the reptile [of "higher lawism and negropholism"] contemptible in its insignificance, has enlarged its proportions, and disseminated its poisonous effluvia, with little exception, through the whole Northern and North-Western portion of the confederacy." Senator Albert Gallatin Brown voiced the same concern. "Twenty years ago," he told a large audience of Mississippians in 1858, "this [anti-Southern] sentiment was confined to a few fanatics; now it pervades all classes, ages, and sexes of society."³² Northern criticism, it seemed, was no longer limited to a few isolated radicals, but was now embraced by mainstream society.

³¹ *Woodville Republican*, Aug. 9, 1853.

³² *The Fayette Watchtower*, July 31, 1857. Brown, "Speech at Hazlehurst," in M. W. Cluskey, ed., *Speeches, Messages, and Other Writings of the Hon. Albert G. Brown, A Senator in Congress from the State of Mississippi* (Philadelphia: Jas. B. Smith and Co., 1859), 597.

As in the earlier crisis, Mississippians who found the critique humiliating defined it in terms of honor, manliness, and Christianity. Over and over they used the same language: humiliating, degrading, insulting. "[T]o deny us the right and privilege [of slavery in the territories] would be to deny our equality in the Union," summarized one local gathering, "and would be a wrong and degradation to which a high spirited people should not submit."³³ Republican propaganda labeled southerners and their way of life as inferior, morally degenerate, and unworthy of the national experience. U. S. Representative Lucius Q. C. Lamar echoed the sentiments of many public spokesmen

³³ *The Weekly Democratic Advocate*, May 5, 1859. The argument that slavery was mostly a symbolic issue, of course, has a long history. Avery Craven acknowledged the importance of southern honor and Republican's declaration of the moral superiority of northern society. See *The Repressible Conflict, 1830-1861* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1939); "Why the Southern States Seceded," in George Knoles, ed., *The Crisis of the Union, 1860-1861* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 60-79; or *The Growth of Southern Nationalism, 1848-1861* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1953). More recently, Bertram Wyatt-Brown argued that southern honor was central to the sectional crisis. Southerners wanted access to new land, but "[n]o less significant . . . was southern whites' resentment against any congressional measure which implied the moral inferiority of their region, labor system, or style of life." See esp. "Honor and Secession," in *Yankee Saints and Southern Sinners* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 199. J. Mills Thornton, in his study of Alabama, also made explicit the moral implications of free soil, which "came to be seen as the primary symbol of second-class citizenship." Southerners responded with such vehemence precisely because free soil "involved obvious and demeaning governmental discrimination against the South." Thus, Thornton argues, secessionists preached that Republicanism threatened not only to shut off their access to new territory, but more importantly endangered Alabamians's claims to liberty and equality within American society. See *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 220, 221 (quotes). Even William Cooper, who most clearly places slavery at the center of southern politics and secession, acknowledges that Republicanism was also "an unforgivable slander" to southerners, for whom "good name and reputation were the personal hallmarks of free and honorable men." See *Liberty and Slavery: Southern Politics to 1860* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983), 257.

when he complained of the North's insulting language and threats to the security of slavery. "It is a unanimous sentiment in the South that the [mere] existence of this Republican organization is a standing menace to her peace and security, and a standing insult to her character." Furthermore, these objections were not simply public rhetoric, but in private Mississippians used the same language. Senator Albert Gallatin Brown wrote to his close friend J. F. H. Claiborne, bitterly disappointed over the Republicans's strength among northern voters. Their platform, he said, represented a galling insult, "meant to break the spirit, destroy the institutions, and ultimately disgrace and ruin the Southern people."³⁴ Republicanism, then, meant much more than a threat to slavery. It was a humiliating disgrace to southern pride in general, and for men in particular, an intolerable slap in the face.³⁵

³⁴ Lamar, "On Southern Slavery and Slaveholders," Feb. 21, 1860, in Edward Mayes, *Lucius Q. C. Lamar: His Life, Times, and Speeches, 1825-1893* (Nashville, TN: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1896), 625. Albert Gallatin Brown to J. F. H. Claiborne, Feb. 4, 1856, Claiborne Collection, Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH), Jackson, MS, folder 7.

³⁵ See also Wyatt-Brown, *Yankee Saints and Southern Sinners*, 188, 212, and *passim*; and Thornton, *Politics and Power*, 213-220, 226. Thornton claims the fire-eaters made "two interlocking appeals, one to freedom and the ideal of individual autonomy, and one to equality and the alleged threat to manhood and self-respect" (213). And he further points out the relative unimportance of actual access to new slave territory, as compared to the symbolic force of free soil as a moral insult. See esp. 225-226. This interpretation of the Republican advance is also central to the work of many historians of northern politics, in particular the "ethnoculturalists." Joel Silbey noted southerners' outrage at the Republican party's "moralism" and Puritanical zeal. "New Englanders arrogantly believed they had a monopoly on truth," Silbey says of the southern attitude. See "The Surge of Republican Power: Partisan Antipathy, American Social Conflict, and the Coming of the Civil War," in Stephen E. Maizlish and Joel Silbey, eds., *Essays on American Antebellum Politics, 1840-1860* (College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 1982), 214. The importance of the Republicans' anti-southern--as opposed to antislavery--attitude is

More than simply a threat to male pride, though, the Republican critique questioned southerners' claim to be good Christians. Like ten years earlier, Mississippians voiced their righteous fury at those in the North who preached slavery was a sin. Whether or not they were men of intense personal faith, most Mississippians believed themselves good Christians and saw no incongruity between those characteristics and the maintenance of slavery. Senator Brown declared solemnly that "slavery is a good thing *per se*; I believe it to be a great moral, social, and political blessing--a blessing to the master and a blessing to the slave . . . [and] it is of Divine origin." "What God has ordained, cannot be wrong."³⁶ The abolitionists' attack thus dealt a double blow to their reputation, doubting their status both as "real" men and as true Christians. Mississippi's Lucius Q. C. Lamar regularly hammered his northern opponents with scripture and verse, arguing that there were no religious or moral reasons to attack slavery. The Christian church, he repeated, "itself was a slaveholder, and Christian kings and princes followed its example." Slavery, and thus white southerners, did not violate the laws of God.³⁷

likewise central in the work of Ronald Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827-1861* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971).

³⁶ "Speech at Hazlehurst," in Cluskey, ed., *Albert G. Brown*, 594, 595. On the importance of the religious foundation of the proslavery argument, see esp. Drew Gilpin Faust, ed., *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1981). She concludes that the Bible was at the core of "mainstream" proslavery logic.

³⁷ Lamar, "On Southern Slavery and Southern Slaveholders," quoted in Mayes, *Lamar*, 628.

In the late 1850s this attitude became especially clear in debates over the international slave trade. Closed for over forty years, a minority of southerners began to advocate its revival: if slavery was not immoral, why the trade? Although most southern leaders did not want it reopened, many voiced outrage at the dominant northern critique. Senator Brown opposed public discussion of the slave trade issue as it would, he argued, only divide the South at a time when complete unity was essential. He further acknowledged the power of Congress over laws respecting the international trade. But, he declared that lawmakers had gone "out of their way to denounce the traffic as piracy. This was a gratuitous affront to the South. It implied that the trade was inherently wrong, and involved the highest degree of moral turpitude." That it was, legally, "piracy" he conceded, but "there is in it no inherent moral guilt." It was the suggestion of moral turpitude to which Brown and many others objected, not closing the trade. Similarly, Mississippi's John Anthony Quitman fumed over a Republican resolution in the House that declared the slave trade "shocking to the moral sentiment" of "enlightened mankind," and a "horrid and inhumane" act worthy of the "reproach and execration of all civilized and Christian people throughout the world." Quitman and others--not disputing the trade's illegality or wanting it reopened--offered the following in response: "That it [the trade] is inexpedient, unwise, and contrary to the settled policy of the United States to repeal the laws prohibiting the African slave-trade."³⁸ What southerners objected to was the

³⁸ "Speech at Hazlehurst," in Cluskey, ed., *Albert G. Brown*, 596. House resolutions quoted in J. F. H. Claiborne, *Life and Correspondence of John A. Quitman* (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1860), 340.

implication of moral depravity; it was not the trade they defended, but rather their claim to be a Christian people.

That the minority opponents of immediate secession used the same discourse of honor, manliness and Christianity testified to its pervasive effectiveness as the universal *lingua franca* of sectionalism. As was true in 1850-51, men who eschewed the most militant form of "redress" (immediate, separate-state secession) needed to account for their "timidity," or face the charge of "base submission" and cowardice. One strategy was to deny that the current situation represented an insult great enough to demand secession--this was the chief, and successful tactic used by Unionists in 1851. As before, men who employed this argument were quick to remind readers that if, in fact, the insult threatened their honor then secession would be the proper course. As late as mid-1858, after Congress rejected the Lecompton constitution, many Mississippians apparently considered this sound logic. One editor lampooned the suggestion that his state ought to secede over "so trivial a pretext" as the non-admission of Kansas--a state "palpably Northern in sentiment." "If we had to choose between disgrace and dishonor, or disunion and destruction," he summarized, "we would certainly choose disunion and destruction, but there is no need of a choice." Another contemporary, Milford Woodruff, declared no need for a violent remedy as late as February, 1859. "I am for our Union, out and out" he proclaimed, but if the Republicans "keep up their officious, unchristian, unconstitutional interference, I go in, with might and main, for a Glorious Southern Confederacy."³⁹ Few men were prepared

³⁹ *The Prairie News*, Apr. 22, 1858, Feb. 3, 1859. Also *The American Citizen*, Oct. 1, 1859.

to deny that insults to personal and community honor might require secession and the possibility of civil war, although a shrinking minority tried to insist that the Republican insult had not yet threatened their "manly equality."

Another anti-secession tactic was to turn the accusation of cowardice on the fire-eaters. "Who are the "Submissionists" and "Cowards"?" asked more than one editorial. "Real" men who wanted to stay in the Union as long as possible and fight for the southern share of public buildings, army and navy supplies, and the Capitol itself were no cowards. Conversely the real submissionists, this argument ran, were hot-headed disunionists willing to "slink away" into the night and abandon seventy-five years of investment and heritage. Still, these luke-warm Unionists never failed to pledge their willingness for secession, once the possibility of adequate "redress" within the Union seemed hopeless. As one editor concluded, "[l]et us fight for our rights in the Union, and if we are overpowered, then let us all go together, and demand a fair division of all property belonging to the Union."⁴⁰ True men of honor, then, would exhaust all chances for satisfaction within the Union before turning, properly, to more drastic measures.

Local politician Fulton Anderson likewise called on the sacred language of honor and manliness when he questioned the efficacy of separate-state secession, preferring instead a cooperative movement. He acknowledged that the "unrelenting hatred" that most northerners showed for the South and "her sacred institutions" with the election of Lincoln constituted a "declaration of war." Southern men, Anderson continued, should resist for

⁴⁰ *Brandon Republican*, Dec. 6, 1860.

the present this "contemptuously declared" war and meet in convention to seek "common redress." To act independently would signal a lack of faith in "our fellow southern men," bound together "by every tie of honor and of friendship." In short, separate-state secession would call into question the manhood of other southerners. If Mississippians acted alone, what else could Georgia's and Alabama's men think but that their neighbors felt unsure of their resolve, their very courage as men of honor. On the other hand, to unite as southern men in defense of the greater community would demonstrate to one another their willful courage. A southern confederacy, Anderson concluded, "will not be [accomplished] by a few States taking the irrevocable step which declares to a majority of their Southern brethren that they are not to be trusted with the vindication of their honor."⁴¹

The opponents of separate-state secession, then, called upon the same values of honor and manliness as their more hasty counterparts. Recognizing the need to defend their manhood and fearful for their honor and reputation, men like Fulton Anderson presented themselves as the "truly manful" defenders of the South. Of course his proposed solution also underscores the basic unanimity among Mississippians. He did not rule out secession, in fact he endorsed it, but only in cooperation with other slaveholding states. Other "Unionists" likewise made clear their belief that Republicanism was an insult too gross to ignore. They simply wanted satisfaction within the Union if possible, but outside if necessary. The two major groups of 1860 voters, "immediatists" and "cooperationists," supporters of John Breckinridge and John Bell, respectively, composed over 95 percent of

⁴¹ *The Jackson News*, quoted in the *Brandon Republican*, Dec. 6, 1860.

the voters in 1860. Both groups wanted some sort of resistance.⁴² The former, nearly 60 percent of all Mississippi voters, favored immediate, separate-state secession.⁴³

The Bell supporters, a less unified group, wanted either cooperative secession or cooperative resistance within the Union (if possible), but all agreed that disunion remained viable. In short, between Breckinridge's immediatists and the cooperative seceders who supported John Bell, a reasonable estimate is that more than three-fourths of Mississippi's voters considered secession the proper response to Lincoln's election; or, at least, voted for representatives embracing that position. "Unconditional Unionists" were a rare breed in Mississippi by the late 1850s. To rule out the possibility of secession and all it implied--violence and possibly death, both personal and social--was truly a cowardly attitude within southern male culture and the political culture of Mississippi. Like individual politicians willing to risk death on the field of honor, the vast majority of men agreed that secession was a suitable response to Republican insults that threatened their sacred institution, their conception of white liberty, and ultimately the fabric of southern manhood.

⁴² Cooper, in *Liberty and Slavery*, argues the opposite: that cooperationists were committed to the Union while Breckinridge men consciously aimed to destroy it. "While Democrats and Opposition men along with Constitutional Unionists struggled with each other over who could better protect the South in the Union, the Fire-eaters aimed to destroy the Union. They pictured the Union as a dagger poised to plunge into the southern heart" (268). Although later he backs off and admits the ambiguity of "cooperation." See 275-276.

⁴³ On the relationship between the presidential contest and various elections for convention delegates, and on the commitment to secession among Breckinridge voters, see esp. Peyton McCrary, Clark Miller, and Dale Baum, "Class and Party in the Secession Crisis: Voting Behavior in the Deep South, 1856-1861," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 8 (Winter 1978), 429-457.

Mississippians, in effect, bound up a series of issues and code words--states rights, white liberty, slavery, political parity with the North--under the rubric of "equality."⁴⁴ Equality was really the essence of their outrage and it struck directly at the heart of manliness and honor. If northerners insulted their "manly equality" then they were obligated to respond; it was a challenge that could not be left unanswered. Mississippi's men challenged one another to stand up "as men" and defend themselves, their communities, and finally their regional way of life--to exonerate themselves as good men and good Christians.⁴⁵ Slavery was of course important, as were "states rights" and the

⁴⁴ For Cooper and Thornton, in particular, the need to protect "liberty" was the essence of secession. Obsessed with independence and reminded daily of the consequences of abject dependency, southerners considered Republicanism a mortal threat to their equality and way of life. In short, they emphasize personal independence, or "liberty." I argue that liberty was just another code word for equality, the heart of which was southerners' definition of manliness. Personal independence was unquestionably important to manliness ("manly independence"), but was only a part of it; including most importantly, honor or reputation, and power.

⁴⁵ Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Lowcountry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) has recently argued that masculinity was central to the secession crisis among lowcountry yeomen in South Carolina. She locates masculinity, though, in household relations: men were men because they dominated women, children, and slaves. By defending slavery and their patriarchal social system, through secession, men were, in essence, protecting their "access" to manhood. Without slaves and women to dominate, they would not be men. I emphasize, instead, the driving force of male rivalry in southerners' definition of manhood. This places greater emphasis on the public arena, especially politics, and helps account for the great amount of violence associated with it. Rather than men dominating women and slaves (which they could all do), real honor and power came from the acknowledged respect of other men. To ensure that consideration of equality, men had constantly to prove themselves to one another, not to their wives and slaves.

The connection between personal reputation and community honor was crucial. Because honor was conferred by the community, southerners tended to conflate personal and public. Thus, Republicanism not only struck a blow against men's personal honor, but

perceived threat to white liberty. But they all came together in the issue of equality, which was ultimately a challenge to their manhood, an insult demanding an answer.

The political culture, though, remained decisive. Even for men obsessed with honor and forever declaring their equal manhood, anonymous insults could have been ignored. What made Mississippians seek a decisive, eventually violent confrontation was their interpretation of Republican party rhetoric: it was a personal insult. Conditioned by their own attitudes toward politics—held captive by their political culture—they responded in the only way possible. Had Mississippi enjoyed a viable partisan culture in the preceding years, men might well have behaved differently. In the upper South, of course, they did. Most voters in Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee and elsewhere, still southern men of honor and desirous of protecting their beloved institution did not reply to Republican "insults" in the same manner. In those states an accepted party system developed and depersonalized much political conflict, but in Mississippi men never accepted parties and political conflict remained tied to a series of personal relationships.⁴⁶

extended to family and neighborhood, and ultimately to state and region. See esp. Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, esp. part three; Stowe, *Intimacy and Power*, 5-49; and the discussion in Chapter Two.

⁴⁶ Political rhetoric in the upper South was equally vitriolic as in Mississippi, although voters responded differently. Cooper, in *Liberty and Slavery*, summarizes conventional wisdom that the extent of slavery was crucial: fewer slaves in the upper South simply meant less concern among voters. He also emphasizes the lack of a well-organized group of fire-eaters in each of these states, men on the scene who could manipulate Lincoln's election to engineer secession. See 252-3, 276, 278. On politics and the more complete commitment to parties in the upper South see Harry L. Watson, *Jacksonian Politics and Community Conflict: The Emergence of the Second American Party System in Cumberland County, North Carolina* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1981); Marc W. Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina* (Baton Rouge, LA:

Furthermore, as an essentially neighborhood exercise, politics put men on display before their friends, neighbors and blood relatives, creating additional pressure that made the sectional discourse of honor and manliness more demanding. To back down meant not only the indignity of failure as a man--psychologically damaging even in an "anonymous" world--but humiliation and shame before one's own community, the very people one looked to for honor and affirmation of manliness.⁴⁷ Contemporaries recognized the local orientation of campaigns and importance of an oral culture in politics. "[U]nless he [the candidate] can stand up before the assembled majesty of the people," wrote one Mississippian, "and there manfully and earnestly plead his cause, he can never rise to

Louisiana State University Press, 1983); and esp. Thomas E. Jeffrey, *State Parties and National Politics: North Carolina, 1815-1861* (Augusta, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1989), who demonstrates the potency of both Whigs and Democrats throughout the secession crisis and into the war itself. For studies outside North Carolina see Jean H. Baker, *The Politics of Continuity: Maryland Political Parties From 1858 to 1870* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973); W. Wayne Smith, "Jacksonian Democracy on the Chesapeake: The Political Institutions," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 62 (Dec. 1967), 381-393; Richard G. Lowe, "The Republican Party in Antebellum Virginia, 1856-1860," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 81 (July 1973), 259-279; and Robert M. Ireland, *Little Kingdoms: The Counties of Kentucky, 1850-1891* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1977). Ireland shows convincingly that county politics in Kentucky started out non-partisan (the first local elections were in 1851, before then county courts had been appointed), but by 1854 parties were clearly involved and by 1858 partisanship dominated. See esp. 42-43.

⁴⁷ On changing notions of manhood in the nineteenth-century North, see David Leverenz, *Manhood and the American Renaissance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989). Leverenz emphasizes the emerging culture of manhood in the North and particularly the Northeast that shifted the emphasis from physical courage to making money. In other words, the principal means through which men proved themselves was now in the economic sphere. See also E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

political distinction." Every candidate, in other words, needed to "survive" the test of public scrutiny in this hothouse atmosphere to receive an endorsement from the community.⁴⁸

Previous historians of southern secession have explained it as "inevitable," the product of a "bungling generation," or more recently, as a careful plan by planters to forestall class warfare.⁴⁹ I argue that in Mississippi disunion was a product of the natural interaction of southern honor, men's visceral anger, and Mississippi's antiparty, community-based political culture. It was not engineered by planters fearful of slave incendiarism or the disloyalty of nonslaveholding whites.⁵⁰ Nor was it a clever propaganda

⁴⁸ *Southern Standard*, May 8, 1852. For a similar discussion that demonstrates the non-partisan character of local elections in Georgia, see J. William Harris, *Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society: White Liberty and Black Slavery in Augusta's Hinterlands* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1985): "County-level affairs seem to have had little direct connection with political parties" (112); and "Elections to these local posts most likely depended on a man's general reputation, connections, and limited local campaigning; almost no records of elections survive" (112).

⁴⁹ See James Ford Rhodes, *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1893-1896); Arthur C. Cole, *The Irrepressible Conflict, 1850-1865* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1934); Craven, *The Repressible Conflict*. Historians working within a Marxist framework have explained secession as a conflict between different forms of capitalism or between capitalism and agrarianism. See Barrington J. Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966); and Eugene D. Genovese, "Marxian Interpretations of the Slave South," in Barton J. Bernstein, ed., *Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968).

⁵⁰ This is the central theme in the work of James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Random House, 1982); Michael P. Johnson, *Towards a Patriarchal Republic: The Secession of Georgia* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1977); and Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890*

campaign designed by crafty politicians who played on long-standing fears among the populace.⁵¹ Finally, some historians have emphasized the importance of the Democratic party. After the collapse of Whiggery in the mid-1850s, the argument runs, Democrats became increasingly strident and "radical," without fear of a moderating opposition. Thus, once the "all-powerful" Democratic party machine committed to secession, what voters thought was immaterial.⁵² In Mississippi this does not appear to have been the case. Rather, the complete absence of any powerful party organizations was the decisive factor.

Finally, perhaps more than anything else, what this examination of Mississippi's political culture suggests is that secession was a populist crusade. Other historians have usually condemned a group of politicians or planters who in some way directed or inspired

(New York: Oxford University Press, 1983). See also the discussion in the Introduction.

⁵¹ Thornton, *Politics and Power*; and Cooper, *Liberty and Power*. Others have emphasized the "crisis" of 1860-61 and the ability of planters or politicians to exploit southerners' paranoia of race war (the inevitable result of emancipation); or the alleged fear among slaveowners that if slavery could not expand geographically, then nonslaveowners would quickly see the "sham" of the whole slave-based system as they were increasingly denied access to the planter ideal. See esp. William Barney, *The Secessionist Impulse: Alabama and Mississippi in 1860* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974); and Steven A. Channing, *Crisis of Fear: Secession in South Carolina* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970).

⁵² See Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: Wiley, 1978); and for Mississippi in particular, Percy Lee Rainwater, *Mississippi: Storm Center of Secession 1856-1861* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1938). The ultimate expression of this argument is Thomas Alexander, "The Civil War as Institutional Fulfillment," *Journal of Southern History* 47 (Feb. 1981), 3-32. He begins with the assumption that "[t]he attachment of the individual voter to party in nineteenth-century America was affective, even religious" (14). Then, once a group of well-organized, deeply committed secessionists gained control of the "potent" Democratic machinery, voters simply followed along. "Only through the vehicle of the Democratic party was secession possible" (21).

the whole process.⁵³ Rather, it resulted from a natural reaction among men of honor and culminated in a movement to vindicate their personal honor--and thus by implication the honor of one's neighborhood, local community, and ultimately the state of Mississippi--from the "egregious insults" of Yankee abolitionists. The taint of free soil touched men's conception of their regional--and thus personal--claim to equality as men and good Christians. Mississippians did not need to be prompted by fire-eating editors; they were not manipulated by scheming politicians. Instead, public spokesmen articulated the outrage felt by Mississippi's voters and expressed the moral indignation among men who feared, above all else, the public humiliation that they saw inherent in Republicanism. In short, rather than putting a group of secessionists at the center of the process, I place "blame" on the imperatives of southern male culture, and particularly the implications of those demands within Mississippi's political culture. This explains secession as a political event, but one that was driven by forces deep within southern culture--deeper than a "crisis" of 1860 manipulated and exploited by planters or politicians.

⁵³ Thornton, *Politics and Power*; and Cooper, *Liberty and Slavery* are the best examples of this dominant opinion. Cooper says that secession was "a decision massively influenced by the tactics of the Fire-eaters, who understood the opportunity Lincoln's election provided and with boldness and shrewdness hurried to apply the inexorable pressure that would explode the Union" (273).

APPENDIX

The principal basis of chapter six was a catalog of 1,425 candidates for county and local office. I correlated them from seven counties (Amite, Bolivar, Carroll, Claiborne, Harrison, Hinds, and Jasper), drawn from both regular and special elections between 1849 and 1860. They were collected from surviving manuscript election returns in the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (see Bibliography for a detailed reference list). I included the following offices: county representative; sheriff; treasurer; circuit court clerk; probate court clerk; assessor; coroner; ranger; surveyor; policeman; justice of the peace; and constable. In the seven sample counties, counting six regular and several hundred special elections, that encompassed approximately 2,000 contests. I then located as many of the men as possible in the 1850 and 1860 manuscript schedules of the federal census, in addition to some county tax records. In all, 1,191 men appeared in one or the other census, and numerous others in county tax records. Therefore, I have socioeconomic data on about 90 percent of all the candidates (table A-1).

The overall demographic profiles of candidates for each office within each county appear in tables A-2 thru A-29.

Age: That at which a candidate first ran for an office.

Slaves: Based on either the 1850 or 1860 slave schedules. For those who appeared in both censuses, I pro-rated slaveholdings to correspond to the year in which he ran for office. For example: a man ran for sheriff in 1855, recorded 10 slaves in 1850, 20 in 1860. I credited him with 15 slaves for the time at which he ran for office.

Property: Calculated in the same manner as the number of slaves owned, including pro-rating for those men who appeared in both censuses. In addition, the 1850 census did not include slaves in the "property" heading, but rather only real estate. To compensate, I assigned each slave an average value of 500 dollars. Thus, a man who owned 10 slaves in 1850 was credited with 5,000 dollars of property.

Additional notes: Reflecting the importance of family in determining social rank, I counted the slaves owned and value of property held by parents for those sons still living at home. This amounted to approximately 1.5 percent of the sample. A small number of men were omitted from the calculations in tables A-2 thru A-29 because of extreme variation. For example: there were 37 candidates for constable in Jasper county, of which 26 were located in the census. One man was 76 years old when he ran for office, effecting an increase in the average of 2.8 years. No other candidate was over 60 years, and thus I excluded him as an "extreme outlier." These exclusions amounted to approximately 1.5 percent of the sample.

I calculated the figures for "Average Residency" in table A-1 based on 15 years residency for those men who appeared in both censuses and 5.5 years for those who appeared in only one. I believe these figures to be conservative. Most men who appeared in both censuses were permanent residents, living 20 years or more in the same location.

In addition, some of those recorded in one census only, appeared in the one most distant from their candidacy (i.e. a man who ran for office in 1851, but appeared in the 1860 census only). The data for overall rates of slaveholding in each county were determined by first counting the number of male owners in the slave schedules. That figure I divided by the total number of households (multiplied by .95 to compensate for those headed by women) in each county, producing an estimated percentage of adult male household heads who owned slaves. Finally, relative to mobility, a portion of those who appeared in the 1850 census only, would be deaths and not migrants. Thus, the figure of 9.5 years average residency for all candidates is likely a low estimate. The grouping of county offices was based on average turnout and apparent interest among voters. Sheriff and treasurer typically received full attention from voters (i.e. the rate of turnout matched that for governor, county representative, etc.), while other offices more often fell below the full vote totals. In short, I grouped the offices before making any calculations of average wealth, etc.

Bolivar county: This county experienced such rapid population growth after 1855-56 that some calculations became distorted. As noted in chapter 4, for example, any estimates of eligible voters based on assumptions of uniform demographic growth will be inaccurate for Bolivar county. In the context of this chapter, the white population remained so low until late in the decade that no constables were elected until 1858. In addition, such rapid growth after mid-decade distorted the rates of mobility for this sample. That the hierarchy remained intact in Bolivar despite such a high percentage of newcomers, unfamiliar with one another, provided further evidence for the argument presented here.

Conclusion: The figures in tables A-2 thru A-29 should be considered estimates only. They do, nonetheless, relate a clear sense of the hierarchy of public offices at work in 1850s Mississippi. These aggregate figures, however, cannot convey entirely the perspective realized after studying more than 2,000 contests involving over 1,400 candidates. It is, rather, like trying to impart the understanding gained from reading several thousand letters and diaries with representative quotations.

Information collected on election-day officials and road overseers was correlated in the same manner described above. All biographical information included in the text comes from the manuscript schedules of the federal census in 1850 and/or 1860, unless otherwise cited.

TABLE A-1
ALL CANDIDATES

TOTAL CANDIDATES	1425
MEN FOUND IN EITHER CENSUS	1191 (84%)
MEN FOUND IN BOTH CENSUSES	501 (35%)
SLAVEOWNERS	768 (64%)
PROPERTY OWNERS	1065 (89%)
AVERAGE RESIDENCY	9.5 years

TABLE A-2
AMITE COUNTY

TOTAL CANDIDATES	197
MEN FOUND IN EITHER CENSUS	166 (84%)
MEN FOUND IN BOTH CENSUSES	73 (37%)
SLAVEOWNERS	120 (72%)
PROPERTY OWNERS	157 (95%)
ENTIRE COUNTY, MALE SLAVEOWNERS in 1850	454 (72%)
ENTIRE COUNTY, MALE SLAVEOWNERS in 1860	542 (74%)

TABLE A-3
AMITE COUNTY, REPRESENTATIVE

TOTAL CANDIDATES	13
MEN FOUND IN EITHER CENSUS	13 (100%)
MEN FOUND IN BOTH CENSUSES	8 (61%)
SLAVEOWNERS	13 (100%)
PROPERTY OWNERS	13 (100%)
AVERAGE AGE	37.9
AVERAGE SLAVEOWNING	30.9
AVERAGE PROPERTY	\$24,653

TABLE A-4
AMITE COUNTY, COUNTY OFFICES

	SHERIFF/ TREAS'ER	CLERKS/ ASS'SOR	RANGER/ COR'NER/ SURV'OR
TOTAL CANDIDATES	13	27	11
MEN FOUND IN EITHER CENSUS	12 (92%)	26 (96%)	9 (82%)
MEN FOUND IN BOTH CENSUSES	8 (61%)	10 (38%)	7 (64%)
SLAVEOWNERS	10 (83%)	22 (85%)	8 (89%)
PROPERTY OWNERS	12 (92%)	26 (100%)	9 (100%)
AVERAGE AGE	36.7	29.4	35.9
AVERAGE SLAVEOWNING	12.0	3.6	5.8
AVERAGE PROPERTY	\$13,350	\$4,453	\$4,782

TABLE A-5
AMITE COUNTY, PRECINCT OFFICES

	BOARD of POLICE	JUSTICE of the PEACE	CON- STABLE
TOTAL CANDIDATES	35	50	60
MEN FOUND IN EITHER CENSUS	29 (83%)	45 (90%)	45 (75%)
MEN FOUND IN BOTH CENSUSES	15 (43%)	17 (34%)	12 (20%)
SLAVEOWNERS	28 (97%)	31 (69%)	23 (51%)
PROPERTY OWNERS	29 (100%)	45 (100%)	37 (82%)
AVERAGE AGE	34.1	36.9	34.3
AVERAGE SLAVEOWNING	9.8	4.0	1.6
AVERAGE PROPERTY	\$9,497	\$4,329	\$2,702

TABLE A-6
BOLIVAR COUNTY

TOTAL CANDIDATES	113
MEN FOUND IN EITHER CENSUS	88 (78%)
MEN FOUND IN BOTH CENSUSES	21 (19%)
SLAVEOWNERS	53 (60%)
PROPERTY OWNERS	81 (92%)
ENTIRE COUNTY, MALE SLAVEOWNERS in 1850	62 (69%)
ENTIRE COUNTY, MALE SLAVEOWNERS in 1860	235 (66%)

TABLE A-7
BOLIVAR COUNTY, REPRESENTATIVE

TOTAL CANDIDATES	5
MEN FOUND IN EITHER CENSUS	5 (100%)
MEN FOUND IN BOTH CENSUSES	2 (40%)
SLAVEOWNERS	5 (100%)
PROPERTY OWNERS	5 (100%)
AVERAGE AGE	36.5
AVERAGE SLAVEOWNING	29.8
AVERAGE PROPERTY	\$57,080

TABLE A-8
BOLIVAR COUNTY, COUNTY OFFICES

	SHERIFF/ TREAS'ER	CLERKS/ ASS'SOR	RANGER/ COR'NER/ SURV'OR
TOTAL CANDIDATES	13	17	30
MEN FOUND IN EITHER CENSUS	13 (100%)	12 (71%)	21 (70%)
MEN FOUND IN BOTH CENSUSES	3 (23%)	3 (18%)	6 (20%)
SLAVEOWNERS	8 (62%)	7 (58%)	14 (67%)
PROPERTY OWNERS	13 (100%)	11 (92%)	20 (95%)
AVERAGE AGE	36.9	27.2	32.1
AVERAGE SLAVEOWNING	15.5	3.5	7.2
AVERAGE PROPERTY	\$18,177	\$4,154	\$11,291

TABLE A-9
BOLIVAR COUNTY, PRECINCT OFFICES

	BOARD of POLICE	JUSTICE of the PEACE	CON- STABLE
TOTAL CANDIDATES	25	21	9
MEN FOUND IN EITHER CENSUS	23 (92%)	19 (90%)	8 (89%)
MEN FOUND IN BOTH CENSUSES	7 (28%)	3 (14%)	1 (11%)
SLAVEOWNERS	18 (78%)	11 (58%)	1 (13%)
PROPERTY OWNERS	21 (91%)	15 (79%)	7 (88%)
AVERAGE AGE	36.5	34.7	36.8
AVERAGE SLAVEOWNING	16.4	4.8	1.3
AVERAGE PROPERTY	\$27,819	\$8,135	\$1,457

TABLE A-10
CARROLL COUNTY

TOTAL CANDIDATES	310
MEN FOUND IN EITHER CENSUS	269 (87%)
MEN FOUND IN BOTH CENSUSES	126 (41%)
SLAVEOWNERS	189 (70%)
PROPERTY OWNERS	226 (84%)
ENTIRE COUNTY, MALE SLAVEOWNERS in 1850	856 (62%)
ENTIRE COUNTY, MALE SLAVEOWNERS in 1860	973 (67%)

TABLE A-11
CARROLL COUNTY, REPRESENTATIVE

TOTAL CANDIDATES	16
MEN FOUND IN EITHER CENSUS	16 (100%)
MEN FOUND IN BOTH CENSUSES	10 (63%)
SLAVEOWNERS	13 (81%)
PROPERTY OWNERS	16 (100%)
AVERAGE AGE	36.3
AVERAGE SLAVEOWNING	15.7
AVERAGE PROPERTY	\$20,094

TABLE A-12

CARROLL COUNTY, COUNTY OFFICES

	SHERIFF/ TREAS'ER	CLERKS/ ASS'SOR	RANGER/ COR'NER/ SURV'OR
TOTAL CANDIDATES	15	23	24
MEN FOUND IN EITHER CENSUS	15 (100%)	21 (91%)	19 (79%)
MEN FOUND IN BOTH CENSUSES	11 (73%)	11 (48%)	11 (46%)
SLAVEOWNERS	13 (87%)	16 (76%)	11 (58%)
PROPERTY OWNERS	14 (93%)	18 (86%)	15 (79%)
AVERAGE AGE	39.0	33.8	39.7
AVERAGE SLAVEOWNING	7.3	3.4	.9
AVERAGE PROPERTY	\$9,107	\$4,690	\$1,902

TABLE A-13

CARROLL COUNTY, PRECINCT OFFICES

	BOARD of POLICE	JUSTICE of the PEACE	CON- STABLE
TOTAL CANDIDATES	40	88	102
MEN FOUND IN EITHER CENSUS	35 (88%)	79 (90%)	85 (83%)
MEN FOUND IN BOTH CENSUSES	18 (45%)	41 (47%)	24 (24%)
SLAVEOWNERS	31 (89%)	62 (78%)	44 (52%)
PROPERTY OWNERS	33 (94%)	71 (90%)	64 (75%)
AVERAGE AGE	41.5	37.0	33.3
AVERAGE SLAVEOWNING	13.1	5.8	2.8
AVERAGE PROPERTY	\$12,742	\$5,539	\$2,411

TABLE A-14
CLAIBORNE COUNTY

TOTAL CANDIDATES	139
MEN FOUND IN EITHER CENSUS	123 (88%)
MEN FOUND IN BOTH CENSUSES	57 (41%)
SLAVEOWNERS	89 (72%)
PROPERTY OWNERS	109 (89%)
ENTIRE COUNTY, MALE SLAVEOWNERS in 1850	387 (62%)
ENTIRE COUNTY, MALE SLAVEOWNERS in 1860	348 (45%)

TABLE A-15
CLAIBORNE COUNTY, REPRESENTATIVE

TOTAL CANDIDATES	6
MEN FOUND IN EITHER CENSUS	6 (100%)
MEN FOUND IN BOTH CENSUSES	5 (83%)
SLAVEOWNERS	5 (83%)
PROPERTY OWNERS	5 (83%)
AVERAGE AGE	35.5
AVERAGE SLAVEOWNING	36.0
AVERAGE PROPERTY	\$31,167

TABLE A-16

CLAIBORNE COUNTY, COUNTY OFFICES

	SHERIFF/ TREAS'ER	CLERKS/ ASS'SOR	RANGER/ COR'NER/ SURV'OR
TOTAL CANDIDATES	19	21	19
MEN FOUND IN EITHER CENSUS	13 (93%)	18 (86%)	13 (68%)
MEN FOUND IN BOTH CENSUSES	6 (46%)	9 (43%)	6 (32%)
SLAVEOWNERS	9 (69%)	14 (78%)	8 (62%)
PROPERTY OWNERS	11 (85%)	16 (89%)	12 (92%)
AVERAGE AGE	37.3	35.5	30.5
AVERAGE SLAVEOWNING	9.0	10.7	2.9
AVERAGE PROPERTY	\$10,441	\$9,258	\$3,559

TABLE A-17

CLAIBORNE COUNTY, PRECINCT OFFICES

	BOARD of POLICE	JUSTICE of the PEACE	CON- STABLE
TOTAL CANDIDATES	32	38	23
MEN FOUND IN EITHER CENSUS	31 (97%)	34 (89%)	19 (83%)
MEN FOUND IN BOTH CENSUSES	19 (59%)	14 (37%)	6 (26%)
SLAVEOWNERS	28 (90%)	25 (74%)	8 (42%)
PROPERTY OWNERS	30 (97%)	31 (91%)	13 (68%)
AVERAGE AGE	36.8	38.7	34.6
AVERAGE SLAVEOWNING	48.5	10.0	3.7
AVERAGE PROPERTY	\$41,758	\$12,766	\$1,735

TABLE A-18
HARRISON COUNTY

TOTAL CANDIDATES	177
MEN FOUND IN EITHER CENSUS	121 (68%)
MEN FOUND IN BOTH CENSUSES	43 (24%)
SLAVEOWNERS	47 (39%)
PROPERTY OWNERS	102 (84%)
ENTIRE COUNTY, MALE SLAVEOWNERS in 1850	228 (33%)
ENTIRE COUNTY, MALE SLAVEOWNERS in 1860	164 (25%)

TABLE A-19
HARRISON COUNTY, REPRESENTATIVE

TOTAL CANDIDATES	7
MEN FOUND IN EITHER CENSUS	5 (71%)
MEN FOUND IN BOTH CENSUSES	5 (71%)
SLAVEOWNERS	5 (100%)
PROPERTY OWNERS	5 (100%)
AVERAGE AGE	36.2
AVERAGE SLAVEOWNING	7.8
AVERAGE PROPERTY	\$8,800

TABLE A-20

HARRISON COUNTY, COUNTY OFFICES

	SHERIFF/ TREAS'ER	CLERKS/ ASS'SOR	RANGER/ COR'NER/ SURV'OR
TOTAL CANDIDATES	25	18	27
MEN FOUND IN EITHER CENSUS	18 (72%)	9 (50%)	15 (56%)
MEN FOUND IN BOTH CENSUSES	7 (28%)	3 (17%)	6 (22%)
SLAVEOWNERS	8 (44%)	5 (42%)	4 (27%)
PROPERTY OWNERS	17 (94%)	8 (67%)	9 (60%)
AVERAGE AGE	35.7	33.7	37.9
AVERAGE SLAVEOWNING	2.4	1.4	.5
AVERAGE PROPERTY	\$4,133	\$2,017	\$1,037

TABLE A-21

HARRISON COUNTY, PRECINCT OFFICES

	BOARD of POLICE	JUSTICE of the PEACE	CON- STABLE
TOTAL CANDIDATES	34	41	27
MEN FOUND IN EITHER CENSUS	27 (79%)	31 (76%)	19 (70%)
MEN FOUND IN BOTH CENSUSES	10 (29%)	7 (23%)	7 (26%)
SLAVEOWNERS	13 (48%)	12 (39%)	2 (11%)
PROPERTY OWNERS	25 (93%)	28 (90%)	14 (74%)
AVERAGE AGE	42.7	40.6	36.3
AVERAGE SLAVEOWNING	4.6	.8	.3
AVERAGE PROPERTY	\$3,320	\$1,769	\$ 726

TABLE A-22
HINDS COUNTY

TOTAL CANDIDATES	285
MEN FOUND IN EITHER CENSUS	247 (87%)
MEN FOUND IN BOTH CENSUSES	109 (38%)
SLAVEOWNERS	170 (69%)
PROPERTY OWNERS	225 (91%)
ENTIRE COUNTY, MALE SLAVEOWNERS in 1850	1062 (67%)
ENTIRE COUNTY, MALE SLAVEOWNERS in 1860	1113 (76%)*

* estimated total

TABLE A-23
HINDS COUNTY, REPRESENTATIVE

TOTAL CANDIDATES	24
MEN FOUND IN EITHER CENSUS	22 (92%)
MEN FOUND IN BOTH CENSUSES	13 (54%)
SLAVEOWNERS	19 (86%)
PROPERTY OWNERS	21 (95%)
AVERAGE AGE	40.9
AVERAGE SLAVEOWNING	21.8
AVERAGE PROPERTY	\$27,476

TABLE A-24
HINDS COUNTY, COUNTY OFFICES

	SHERIFF/ TREAS'ER	CLERKS/ ASS'SOR	RANGER/ COR'NER/ SURV'OR
TOTAL CANDIDATES	16	21	19
MEN FOUND IN EITHER CENSUS	14 (88%)	18 (86%)	17 (89%)
MEN FOUND IN BOTH CENSUSES	8 (50%)	9 (43%)	6 (32%)
SLAVEOWNERS	11 (79%)	13 (72%)	8 (47%)
PROPERTY OWNERS	13 (93%)	17 (94%)	13 (76%)
AVERAGE AGE	40.1	29.0	32.2
AVERAGE SLAVEOWNING	9.5	5.1	3.5
AVERAGE PROPERTY	\$7,578	\$5,361	\$5,060

TABLE A-25
HINDS COUNTY, PRECINCT OFFICES

	BOARD of POLICE	JUSTICE of the PEACE	CON- STABLE
TOTAL CANDIDATES	30	72	60
MEN FOUND IN EITHER CENSUS	28 (93%)	63 (88%)	46 (77%)
MEN FOUND IN BOTH CENSUSES	18 (64%)	27 (38%)	13 (22%)
SLAVEOWNERS	23 (82%)	51 (81%)	19 (41%)
PROPERTY OWNERS	26 (93%)	58 (92%)	37 (80%)
AVERAGE AGE	41.1	37.8	34.2
AVERAGE SLAVEOWNING	19.0	7.1	1.4
AVERAGE PROPERTY	\$22,764	\$7,440	\$1,847

TABLE A-26
JASPER COUNTY

TOTAL CANDIDATES	204
MEN FOUND IN EITHER CENSUS	177 (87%)
MEN FOUND IN BOTH CENSUSES	72 (35%)
SLAVEOWNERS	100 (57%)
PROPERTY OWNERS	165 (93%)
ENTIRE COUNTY, MALE SLAVEOWNERS in 1850	273 (43%)
ENTIRE COUNTY, MALE SLAVEOWNERS in 1860	458 (46%)

TABLE A-27
JASPER COUNTY, REPRESENTATIVE

TOTAL CANDIDATES	10
MEN FOUND IN EITHER CENSUS	10 (100%)
MEN FOUND IN BOTH CENSUSES	6 (60%)
SLAVEOWNERS	9 (90%)
PROPERTY OWNERS	10 (100%)
AVERAGE AGE	39.9
AVERAGE SLAVEOWNING	16.8
AVERAGE PROPERTY	\$15,004

TABLE A-28

JASPER COUNTY, COUNTY OFFICES

	SHERIFF/ TREAS'ER	CLERKS/ ASS'SOR	RANGER/ COR'NER/ SURV'OR
TOTAL CANDIDATES	15	23	20
MEN FOUND IN EITHER CENSUS	13 (93%)	21 (91%)	16 (80%)
MEN FOUND IN BOTH CENSUSES	11 (73%)	7 (30%)	4 (20%)
SLAVEOWNERS	13 (93%)	12 (57%)	11 (69%)
PROPERTY OWNERS	14 (100%)	20 (95%)	13 (81%)
AVERAGE AGE	35.9	34.9	41.1
AVERAGE SLAVEOWNING	2.6	2.2	3.2
AVERAGE PROPERTY	\$4,442	\$3,618	\$3,447

TABLE A-29

JASPER COUNTY, PRECINCT OFFICES

	BOARD of POLICE	JUSTICE of the PEACE	CON- STABLE
TOTAL CANDIDATES	40	58	37
MEN FOUND IN EITHER CENSUS	37 (93%)	51 (88%)	26 (70%)
MEN FOUND IN BOTH CENSUSES	19 (48%)	17 (29%)	12 (32%)
SLAVEOWNERS	24 (65%)	23 (45%)	10 (38%)
PROPERTY OWNERS	34 (92%)	45 (88%)	20 (77%)
AVERAGE AGE	36.9	36.9	32.5
AVERAGE SLAVEOWNING	5.1	2.2	1.0
AVERAGE PROPERTY	\$6,817	\$3,413	\$1,570

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

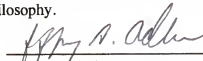
Christopher John Olsen was born in Fargo, North Dakota, on March 19, 1966. He graduated with a B. A. from North Dakota State University in 1988, and with an M. A. from the University of Nebraska in 1990. His parents Richard and Jean Olsen still live in Fargo; three sisters, Catherine, Elizabeth, and Constance are also in North Dakota and Minnesota. In 1995 he married Jennifer Ann Ross in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. In 1996 he joined the faculty of Virginia Wesleyan College in Norfolk, Virginia.

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



Ronald P. Formisano, Chairman
Professor of History

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



Jeffrey S. Adler
Associate Professor of History

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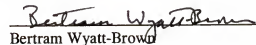
Jeffrey D. Needell
Associate Professor of History

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



Richard K. Scher
Professor of Political Science

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



Bertram Wyatt-Brown
Richard J. Milbauer Professor of History

This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of History in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate School and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

May 1996

Dean, Graduate School